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David Lavery and Rhonda V. Wilcox, Co-Editors

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Recommended. Here and in each issue of *Slayage* the editors will recommend writing on *BtVS* appearing elsewhere.

New Encyclopedia of *Buffy* Studies entries on Whedonverse DVD Commentaries:

- Rebecca Bobbitt: Whedon on "Spin the Bottle"
- Cynthia Burkhead: Whedon on "Innocence"
- Nicholas Bush: Whedon on

"Once More with Feeling"

- Joseph Gualtieri: Whedon on "A Hole in the World"
- Michelle Herr: Whedon on "Chosen"
- Melissa Lamb: Whedon on "Objects in Space"
- Erica Marsh: Whedon and Tim Minear on "The Train Job"
- Hillary Robson: Whedon on "The Body"
- Cynthia Ryan: Whedon on "Serenity"

Other Recommendations:

- Patricia Bieszk, Vampire Hip: Style as Subcultural Expression in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in *Refractory*
- Milly Williamson and Dee Amy Chinn, "The Vampire Spike in Text and Fandom: Unsettling Oppositions in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," Special Issue of the *The European Journal of Cultural Studies*
- Katy Stevens, "Bronzers, Breakaway Pop Hits And Karaoke: Popular Music in the Whedonverse"
- Jennifer A. Hudson. "She's Unpredictable: Ilyria and the Liberating Potential of Chaotic Postmodern Identity," *American Popular Culture.com*

4.4
THE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUFFY STUDIES
Sixteen

Roz Kaveney

A Sense of the Ending: Schrödinger's *Angel*

PDF Version

This essay will be included in Stacey Abbott's *Reading Angel: The TV Spinoff with a Soul,* to be published by I. B. Tauris and appears here with the permission of the author, the editor, and the publisher. Go here to order the book from Amazon.

(1) Joss Whedon has often stated that each year of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was planned to end in such a way that, were the show not renewed, the finale would act as an apt summation of the series so far. This was obviously truer of some years than others – generally speaking, the odd-numbered years were far more clearly possible endings than the even ones, offering definitive closure of a phase in Buffy's career rather than a slingshot into another phase. Both Season Five and Season Seven were particularly planned as artistically satisfying conclusions, albeit with very different messages – Season Five arguing that Buffy's situation can only be relieved by her heroic death, Season Seven allowing her to share, and thus entirely alleviate, slayerhood. Being the Chosen One is a fatal burden; being one of the Chosen Several Thousand is something a young woman might live with.

(2) It has never been the case that endings in *Angel* were so clear-cut and each year culminated in a slingshot ending, an attention-grabber that kept viewers interested by allowing them to speculate on where things were going. Season One ended with the revelation that Angel might, at some stage, expect redemption and rehumanization – the Shanshu of the souled vampire – as the reward for his labours, and

with the resurrection of his vampiric sire and lover, Darla, by the law firm of Wolfram & Hart and its demonic masters (‘To Shanshu in LA’, 1022). Season Two ended with Cordelia’s renunciation of love, glamour and freedom from mortal pain for the sake of her duty; with the arrival of the unknown quantity, Fred; with the information that the Wolf, the Ram and the Hart have power in many dimensions; and, at a moment of happiness, with the revelation of Buffy’s death (‘There’s No Place Like Plrtz Glrb’, 2022).

(3) Season Three ended with Connor’s betrayal and imprisonment of Angel and Cordelia’s ascension to become a Higher Being (‘Tomorrow’, 3022). Season Four, at a point when the show was struggling for renewal, culminated in a major plot twist: Angel’s decision, in order to save Connor’s sanity and Cordelia’s comatose life, to accept a deal whereby he took over Wolfram & Hart’s LA office and wiped his friends’ memories of Connor and much of their lives for the previous year and a half (‘Home’, 4022).

(4) It will be noticed at once that each of these slingshots was to some extent misleading. Darla had been raised as a human with a capacity for being redeemed – by a further irony, her eventual redemption was as a vampire. Angel’s concern with the Shanshu got briefly in the way of the daily grind of his mission. Buffy’s death was impermanent. Cordelia’s self-sacrifice was betrayed by the Powers That Be. Angel’s removal of Connor from the fight, his saving of Cordelia and even the memory wipe were temporary phenomena, while the deal with Wolfram & Hart turned out to be precisely the temptation and trap it seemed; sometimes the expectation of further revelations is itself deceitful.

(5) In the light of all of this, how we assess ‘Not Fade Away’ (5022), the finale of *Angel*’s fifth and final season depends radically on whether this finale is in fact the end. Joss Whedon has stated, repeatedly, that this ending was in most respects what it would have been had the show been renewed for a sixth season. Further, Whedon – and also writers David Fury and Jeff Bell – have indicated, both generally and in detail, the theme and some of the plot arcs of a sixth season that would have followed this finale.1 With vague talk of some future project that would unite at least a few members of the *Angel* cast – at the time of writing, James Marsters (Spike) has indicated, interviewed on the Australian television show *Rove Live* in early July, that talk of four television movies is more than a rumour – the status of ‘Not Fade Away’ as definitive concluding statement is uncertain. If, as seems moderately likely, it is in fact the last of *Angel*, it has to be treated one way; and if the future projects come to fruition, another.

It is, as my subtitle states, the creation of Schrodinger's *Angel*, who at this point in the game is neither undead nor dead. Whedon had the option of a more definitive statement, but preferred this. 'Did I make it so it could lead into an exciting sixth season? I did', he said to *AngelNews*. 'But it's still a final statement if that's what it needs to be.'

(6) Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that there will be no canonical addition to *Buffy* and *Angel* set at a date later than the battle against overwhelming odds in an alley behind the Hyperion Hotel, a spot which previously saw the final death of Darla, the birth of Connor and the rising of the Beast. In this case, the charge of Angel, Spike, Illyria and the already mortally wounded Gunn is a suicidal death charge, a recognition that, in a world ruled by untrustworthy Powers and the Senior Partners, the path of the hero is to go down fighting.

(7) It can be argued, not least by Jennifer Stoy, that this ending contradicts much of what *Angel* has always stood for.2 A death charge that will inevitably leave parts of LA despoiled by demons and dragons is, in this view, a piece of self-indulgent existentialist nonsense in which Angel chooses defiance over practical solutions, chooses to affront the Senior Partners by wiping out their immediate support network – the Circle of the Black Thorn – at the cost of never being able to do anything else good again and, incidentally, signing away his Shanshu and murdering the heroic Drogyn in order to do so. Remarks by Whedon and Fury that, had Season Six happened, it would have been a *Mad Max*-like tale of coping with the aftermath of apocalypse strengthen this argument.

(8) In this reading, the ending of 'Not Fade Away' is an example of what can be called 'Superhero Exceptionalism', the idea that superheroes are exempt from normal considerations and entitled to ignore consequences. Part of the ongoing polemical debate within comics has always been precisely this question – Spider-Man learned at an early stage that 'with great power comes great responsibility', but other superheroes, from the Hulk to Batman, have lived constantly in far greyer areas. As a self-confessed comics geek, one of whose post-*Angel* gigs has been taking over scripting 'The Astonishing X-Men', Joss Whedon will be as obsessed with this debate as any other comics creator or fan.

(9) This view is not without merit; the considerations that have to be weighed against it have, in part, to do with the way that Season Five in general, and its last two episodes in particular, either completes various long-running story and character arcs or, if some form of the

show continues later, at least moves them into a radically new phase. This is particularly true of those arcs that deal with Angel and with characters that are in some sense versions of Angel.

(10) The show *Angel* has always been about earning redemption one day at a time, by slow increments and by helping individuals in trouble case by case, precisely the opposite of attempting redemption by a single gratuitous heroic act of defiance. It is particularly significant, then, that – sent off by Angel to have one last perfect day – Gunn goes to see Anne at her refuge for the homeless and helps her lift charitable donations onto a truck. Anne, it is worth remembering, has a long history as a minor character in this universe – vampire wannabe, slave in an industrial hell, reborn activist tricked by Wolfram & Hart and menaced by zombie cops. Repeatedly saved from supernatural jeopardy, she has become a constant example of both doing mundane good one day at a time and of the point that to save someone is to save the good works they might subsequently do. To bring her back, three years after we last saw her, is clearly intended to establish a plot point: we are deliberately reminded of the core mission of Angel Investigations.

(11) It is particularly appropriate that it is Gunn who goes to her, the one of the core team most obviously compromised and for a while corrupted by involvement with Wolfram & Hart. As the musical themes associated with him on his first appearance in Season One indicate – they are variations on Angel's own themes – he is also the one most like Angel in some ways. One of the major arcs of Season Five is Gunn's progressive corruption and then recuperation. He allows Wolfram & Hart to install legal knowledge in his brain and almost at once becomes capable of legal chicanery ('Conviction', 5001); he is also the member of the Angel Investigations team chosen to have direct communication with the Senior Partners through their Conduit in the White Room ('Home'). He is tricked into signing the customs form for the sarcophagus that will destroy Fred and does so as the price of regaining his legal expertise when it begins to slip away ('Smile Time', 5014). During Fred's painful death Gunn confronts the Conduit, which has taken his own face, and is rebuffed when he asks for Fred's life:

> *Gunn:* I didn't come for a favour. We can make a deal.
> *Gunn 2:* [*disdainfully*] Deals are for the devil.
> *Gunn:* You want someone else? A life for hers. You'll get it. You can have mine.

Gunn 2: I already do. (‘A Hole in the World’, 5015)

(12) Forced to admit his complicity in Fred’s death, Gunn is stabbed by Wesley and rejected by Angel; ironically, only Harmony shows any compassion for him. This is the most abject point he reaches; thereafter he sacrifices himself (‘Shells’, 5016). Rescued from hell by Illyria, he is the first to confront Angel over his seeming decision to become entirely complicit with the Senior Partners (‘Time Bomb’, 5019). His reversion to the side of good is signalled in part by a return to his personal style and original image – he reshaves his head and adopts a less formal mode of dress. Gunn’s path demonstrates that good intentions are not enough, or more precisely that good intentions can easily be corrupted by vices as apparently trivial as vanity in his competence. His conversation with Anne indicates the importance of the mission for its own sake:

> *Gunn:* What if I told you it doesn’t help? What would you do if you found out none of it matters, that it’s all controlled by forces more powerful and uncaring than we can conceive and they will never let it get better down here? What would you do?
> *Anne:* I’d get this truck packed before the new stuff gets here. You wanna give me a hand?

We last see him mortally wounded and determined to go down fighting:

> *Gunn:* Okay … you take the 30,000 on the left …
> *Illyria:* You’re fading. You’ll last ten minutes at best.
> *Gunn:* Let’s make ’em memorable.

(13) Of *Angel*’s main cast, Gunn was often the one least well used, partly because of uncertainties of tone on the part of the white writers about the handling of black street dialogue; Season Five gave him an arc that was an admirable counterpart to the more wobbly handling of more central characters.

(14) The major arc of the fifth season is, of course, that of its central character. The other core characters have accepted the deal with Wolfram & Hart from a combination of idealism and conceit, believing that they can make a difference from the inside and delighted by the shiny new toys they are offered: knowledge for Wesley, a laboratory for Fred, a sense of self-worth for Gunn, limitless showbiz power for Lorne. Angel knows from the beginning that he has taken the deal primarily in order to save Connor and Cordelia and that he has

betrayed his friends by altering their memories. He has reason to suspect that he has been tricked by his worst enemies and no way, because of the memory wipe, of fully discussing this with his friends. The restoration of Wesley's memories – which include the extent of his failed attempts to redeem Lilah – are part of what breaks him; Angel helps destroy his closest friend.

(15) Angel's constant sense of his bad faith is reinforced by various things that happen to him in the course of the season. Earlier errors on his part – his obsession with being a champion, or a lone wolf avenger, or a good provider – have been similarly demonstrated to him over an episode or an arc. In the course of Season Five, he is magically compelled to have sex with the Senior Partners' minion ('Life of the Party', 5005), confronted with the apparent meaninglessness of another hero's struggles ('The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco', 5006), poisoned by a demon parasite into endless hallucinations of his own worthlessness ('Soul Purpose', 5010) and finally literally reduced to the status of a puppet ('Smile Time', 5014). He is specifically told that he has made the wrong choice, both by his dead love Cordelia, now an angelic messenger of the Powers ('You're Welcome', 5012), and by Buffy's comic sidekick Andrew ('Damage', 5011). Angel has to have fallen a long way for the reformed murderer Andrew to be entitled to tell him that he has been corrupted – and Andrew's judgment is confirmed by Giles in a phone call when Angel asks for help from Willow with Fred's final illness ('A Hole in the World').

(16) And yet the choice Angel made in 'Home' is not straightforwardly condemned either. When we meet Connor again, he is sane and untroubled, and manages to remain so even after discovering his superpowers and regaining his memories ('Origin', 5018). In the final episode, it is with his son that Angel spends his last perfect hours and, during Angel's fight with the Senior Partners' supercharged minion Hamilton, Connor appears and buys Angel a precious few minutes to find a way of defeating Hamilton.

(17) Part of Angel's trouble is that he refuses to listen to the person who most frequently tells him the truth in the course of this season: Spike, who reverts to his *Buffy* Seasons Two to Four status as the trickster teller of uncomfortable truths. As we see in a sequence of flashbacks, Spike has good reason to distrust Angel, who was always the alpha male of their little vampire family and who seduced the neophyte vampire William into the ways of atrocity. Spike points out to him that while it was Drusilla that turned him, it was Angelus who made him a monster. The homoeroticism that many fans have always seen in the relationship – and written reams of 'slash' erotic fan-fiction

about – is at the very least closely related to this power dynamic between them; when Spike finally says ‘’Cause Angel and me have never been intimate – except that one …’, many fans purred with pleasure (‘Power Play’, 5021).

(18) Spike has, after all, always been the most obvious of Angel’s shadow doubles. They share their original names – Angel’s Liam is the Irish form of Spike’s William – and to some extent exchanged natures on becoming vampires; the drunken wastrel Liam became the moody aesthete of death Angelus, whereas the poet William became Spike, who would rather have the instant gratification of a brawl than the drawn-out refined pleasures of sadism. Both are at their most petulant when dealing with their rivalry over Buffy: to pick but one example, Spike has the Buffybot programmed with the belief that Angel ‘has stupid hair’ (‘Intervention’, B5018). One of the completed arcs of Season Five is the process whereby they accept that they are, and always have been, the best of friends, in spite of apparent bitter enmity and mutual betrayal, just as Angelus said they would be on their first meeting.

(19) Spike has acquired the authority needed to tell Angel the bitter truth. He chose to have a soul and chose to save the world at the cost of his own destruction. When they fight for the right to be champion, Spike beats him, simply because he is less conflicted (‘Destiny’, 508). Though Spike’s decision, once he is solid, to replace Angel as the lone vigilante of LA’s night streets is manipulated by Lindsey it is nonetheless valid, as is his later decision to rejoin the group to save Fred and then to help control Illyria (‘Soul Purpose’, ‘A Hole in the World’). After a last resurgence of the old jealousy over Buffy in a weak comedic episode, the two vampires finally accept the immaturity of their bickering (‘The Girl in Question’, 5020). Like everyone else, Spike is fooled by Angel’s pretence of having been corrupted but he does not believe that Angel has become Angelus – Spike would know that, he says. Once Angel has revealed his strategy and asked his friends to assist him in the destruction of the Black Thorn, Spike is the first to volunteer (‘Power Play’). He never loses the chippiness that comes from suspecting he is a better man than Angel, but he decides to die, a loyal lieutenant at his side. There is a generosity to this on the part of both which is deeply attractive.

(20) This season is endlessly stuffed, as befits what was always perhaps a final season, with flashbacks and ironic continuity references.3 For example, in the simultaneous assassinations that are

Angel's scheme in 'Not Fade Away', Angel trusts Spike to save a newborn from the Fell Brethren. Back in Shanghai, Angel chose to save a baby rather than stay with Darla, who condemned his decision to protect its parents with an unfavourable comparison with the detested Spike's murder of a slayer ('Darla', 2007). This back reference helps point to an important issue: the assassination of the Black Thorn is not merely a nihilistic act of defiance but a way of continuing the mission. The rescued baby stands for all the specific victims that the killing saves, and all the potential that such victims embody.

(21) The decision to raise Spike from the dead[4] and introduce him to *Angel*, a show where he had only ever previously appeared as a villain of the week ('In the Dark', 1003) or in flashbacks ('Darla'), was originally made, not for artistic reasons, but because the Warner Brothers network insisted on the addition of this popular character as one of a number of preconditions for commissioning a fifth season. It was not a universally popular decision; admirers of *Angel* were not necessarily admirers of the later seasons of *Buffy* in which Spike became so important. In conjunction with a general background of cuts in the show's budget, the necessity of providing James Marsters with an appropriate salary meant that other characters had to be written out or forgotten.

(22) Nonetheless, by season end, artistic reasons for it had been found – one of the most touching moments of 'Not Fade Away' comes with a classic Whedon bait-and-switch, where Spike's perfect day is spent in a bar where we are led to believe he is going to brawl, only to discover that he is reading William's dreadful love poetry and improvising a new poem about the mother he turned and then dusted. This scene closes Spike's personal arc very neatly – should this episode be the last we ever see of the character – by integrating the warrior and the poet, the prickly rough with the sensitive twit he has done so much to repress.

(23) One of the show's themes has always been that self-reinvention is both necessary and morally dangerous. Lindsey, the closest thing Season Five has to a season-long onscreen villain, has always been another of Angel's shadows, as poor boy made good by doing bad. We first meet him as a self-possessed lawyer ('City Of', 1001) and only gradually realize his complexity and vulnerability. He feints at redemption only to take an improved deal from evil and be maimed by Angel ('Blind Date', 1021; 'To Shanshu in LA'). The loss of his hand re-invents him as a liminal being, since part of him is alive and part dead,

and this does not cease to be the case when he is given new hands, first plastic and then real. His feeling for Darla is in part genuine love and in part a struggle to possess something which is Angel's. When, after losing her, he attacks Angel brutally, he does so in old clothes and a truck that make explicit what we always suspected – that under the smooth surface of the LA lawyer is a working-class kid with a chip ('Epiphany', 2016).

(24) As with Spike, Lindsey's doubling with Angel has a strong and occasionally explicit element of homoeroticism: Darla says to him at one point 'It's not me you want to screw – it's him', and the line is entirely knowing. Lindsey's apparent redemption comes in part from a moral qualm – he is upset to discover that his new hand has been taken from someone he once knew – and in part from an innate rebelliousness. His pride is affronted by the Senior Partners' deceit in the matter of the hand and by the competitive games he is forced to play with Lilah Morgan ('Dead End', 2018). It was redemption without all that much in the way of repentance, penance or even a firm purpose of amendment; it was by some criteria no redemption at all.

(25) One of the reasons for the startling revelation that Lindsey is the secret manipulator behind Spike's resurrection and Eve's betrayal is, of course, that Lindsey has this complicated back-story of rivalry with Angel ('Destiny', 5007). Another is that Christian Kane who plays him was a popular favourite and not a star, having largely abandoned acting for a while to pursue his musical career. Certainly the reappearance of an iconic figure from the show's past was an economic, and possibly a cheap, way of broad-brushing in a nemesis. For a while at least, it is unclear whether Lindsey is good or evil – his structural status as the season's Little Bad does not automatically determine which side he is on – though his attempts to kill Angel offer a clue. Perhaps he is responsible for Spike's resurrection to ensure that, should he kill Angel, there will still be a vampire with a soul around to fulfil the Shanshu prophecy. His attempt on Angel's life after the apparent resurrection of Cordelia – and his attempt to have Spike pre-empt any message she brings from the Powers by telling Spike she is still evil – clearly indicates that he is not, as hinted, working for Good. At the same time, his abduction by the Senior Partners to be tortured in a suburban Hell indicates that he is at most freelancing for Evil rather than a wholly owned subsidiary.

(26) Lindsey's role is ambiguous to the end, partly because he gets loaded with expository material and partly because the writers never, I suggest, sat down clearly to work out what his motivation is, or why it is necessary that Angel commission his execution by Lorne. In

‘Power Play’, it becomes apparent that Lindsey is very well-informed indeed about the Circle of the Black Thorn and how one goes about joining it – his actions throughout the season make most sense on the assumption that this was his intention. One of the requirements appears to be that one kill someone close to one to demonstrate ruthlessness; Angel fulfils this by conning the Circle into believing he was responsible for Fred’s death/ transformation into Illyria. To kill a straightforward enemy would not seem to complete this requirement – but, as has been demonstrated above, Angel is a deal more than that to Lindsey. The implication, not fully developed, is that Lindsey was trying to buy his way into the Circle by killing Angel, and that Angel qualified as a sacrifice because of Lindsey’s quasi-erotic obsession. Accordingly, the last interview between him and Angel in which, on the surface of things, Angel recruits him both as a lieutenant in the assassination of the Circle and as a successor in the struggle should things go wrong, crystallizes Angel’s decision to have him killed not because of anything Lindsey says, but because of what he does not.

(27) In this reading, Angel’s slip of the tongue reference to the erotic subtext between them is more than a sop to the fans:

Lindsey: You want me, I’m on your team.
Angel: I want you, Lindsey. [*beat*] I’m thinking about rephrasing that.
Lindsey: I’d be more comfortable.

(28) This conversation can be read as Angel knowingly giving Lindsey an opportunity to come clean about what he planned and why Angel’s death would have been a sacrifice for him. Significantly neither Lindsey nor his lover Eve tell each other the truth during their last encounter. She fails to admit to him that she had magically-induced sex with Angel and allows him to believe that she is the one thing in his life Angel never touched; and he never explains to the woman who gave up immortality for him why this should matter. In Lindsey’s head, the huge drama is between him and Angel, which is why Angel commissions Lorne, a being Lindsey sees as his inferior, to kill Lindsey once he has served his turn; Lindsey’s last words are of his affront that it should be Lorne who kills him, and not Angel.

(29) There is a darkly humorous ruthless justice to the Angel who arranges this and accepts that the price of it is that Lorne will walk away from him and the struggle thereafter; losing Lorne’s support is part of the butcher’s bill he is prepared to pay. One of the structural reasons for the arrival on the scene of Illyria – ‘the immaculate embodiment of rule’ – is that she has been both monarch and general and can tell Angel things about being a leader that, at this point, he needs to know. Back in Season Two, a temporarily morally dark Angel

talked of ‘waging the war’ as opposed to what Wesley and the others were still doing – ‘fighting the good fight’. Now Illyria tells him through the mouth of the dead Fred that he must accept the logic of his situation again: ‘So much power here, and you quibble over its price. Your conscience binds you. If you want to win a war, you must serve no master but your ambition … (1) A true ruler is as moral as a hurricane … Empty but for the force of his gale.’ (‘Time Bomb’, 5019)

(30) It is precisely because Illyria is not a vampire that she is a worthwhile mirror of Angel’s vampire nature, of the thing he has at the same time to accept and overcome. ‘You’re not looking at your friend; you’re looking at the thing that killed him’ (Giles in ‘The Harvest’, B1002) is even truer of Illyria than it was of, say, Harmony; Illyria is a long dead god/demon that inhabits the corpse of Fred and devoured her soul in the fires of her re-creation. Yet, as with many vampires, it is not as simple as that; even before the restoration of Fred’s memories of her penultimate year and a half of life she is totally Illyria, yet increasingly conjoined or contaminated with elements of Fred. If Illyria were wholly and solely the creature she claims, and believes herself, to be, she would not impersonate Fred for the dead woman’s parents, or offer to give Wesley a final perfect day. Both *Buffy* and *Angel* have always been shows about redemption; the reason why Wesley refuses Illyria’s offer and then accepts it when mortally wounded is not that he dies having finally chosen illusion over reality, but that her offer is an outward sign of genuine inward change. In an interview at the Hyperion convention, Amy Acker said that Joss Whedon redirected the scene having realized that it was not about Wesley’s love for Illyria or Fred, but about Illyria’s love for Wesley.

(31) It is clear that Angel listens to Illyria, but that he does not do precisely what she says. He is, in the last two episodes, prepared to sacrifice people he likes and admires, such as Drogyn. However, his ruthlessness is the servant of his mission, not of his ego: he specifically renounces hope by signing away the Shanshu in order to preserve his cover with the Circle of the Black Thorn. He forgives Harmony for her betrayal, he judges her according to her nature, both as a vampire and as a selfish child, rather than for the personal betrayal, and implicitly accepts her argument that someone who was never trusted cannot have betrayed – she even explains, when he says he never trusted her because she doesn’t have a soul, ‘I would have if you had confidence in me’. Angel’s decision to spare her to pursue what might be her redemption is based partly on recognition of the lost humanity they have in common, and on a ruler’s sense of justice.

(32) In *Angel*, the character who has most consistently acted as Angel's shadow and surrogate is Wesley, whose story has throughout been that of 'The Man who Learns Better'. Remembered by Angel and the audience as the largely useless fop of *Buffy* Season Three, the ex-Watcher has re-invented himself as a leather-clad rogue demon-hunter without having changed his essence. The ways in which he changes are many and varied: to pick but one, he consistently chooses Angel over earlier loyalties to the Watchers' Council, even when what appears to be his father arrives claiming to be its emissary ('Lineage', 5007). Wesley is a character whose essence is to lose and yet lose so honourably as to be admirable. He is the 'loyal servant' who betrays Angel by kidnapping his son, but does it to save him from the prophesied guilt of killing him – and in the long run, Angel has to kill Connor so that he can be reborn as the sane heroic youth of Season Five. Wesley sells his own soul to Wolfram & Hart in a vain attempt to save that of Lilah, whom he no longer loves; he finally wins Fred, only to lose her to Illyria; and it is his death that finally redeems Illyria by teaching her the meaning of human grief. Wesley's death is both the price of Angel's victory and a demonstration that the mission is about self-sacrifice.5

(33) In conclusion, then, we have to judge Season Five in general, and its finale in particular by the fact that they always had to serve two purposes: they had to provide both a series finale for five years of the show and lead logically to a sixth year should one be commissioned, and to further Buffyverse material should it ever be called for. These are not entirely compatible aims – the fact that the season and 'Not Fade Away' work for both as well as they do needs to be weighed against their partial failure at either.

(34) Further, there were other issues. The network's demand that the show move away from strong plot arcs was less honoured than it might have been, but always created problems in a show which had moved into strong arc in its second season. The early part of the season does tend to deal in 'problems of the week', even if some of those problems, notably the fate of those earlier champions, the masked wrestlers, offer a strong symbolic resonance that implies an arc ('The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco', 5006). The handling of Lindsey in this season is weakened by this avoidance of overt arc – he drifts around the background manipulating Spike by pretending to be the long-dead Doyle (another example of his liminal status) and his real motives remain largely obscure.

(35) When Cordelia appears for a single episode, we hear her overt message to Angel, but not the secret one we are told about later; this

feels like improvised retrofitting, even if it is not. The occasional appearance of what we later learn to be the Black Thorn's insignia – on the armoured cyborgs of the supposed Roger Wyndam-Pryce, for example – is not enough to prepare us for the eventual long-delayed appearance of the season's Big Bad, nor are the occasional appearances of beings we later learn to be among its members: Sebassis, Veil, Senator Brucker and so on.

(36) In the end, though, Season Five is what *Angel* has always been about. It is the story of a man whose innate nature is to be a lonely, morally equivocal brooder, whose loyalty to his friends enables him to learn from them. It is the story of a man who learns moral lessons that always prove to be provisional; it is his preparedness to go on learning that counts. Angel is in this respect a wise fool, which is why he is so often clownlike; he is a saviour in constant need of his own redemption. He also has constantly to accept the paradoxes of his own nature – in the fight with the Senior Partners' emissary Hamilton, he wins partly because he accepts the freely proffered help of his son, and partly because he drains Hamilton's strength by biting him – he is both man and monstrous creature of the night.

(37) If the last moments of the show take place in darkness and rain, this is not just noir gesturing – it is because Angel has always inhabited the moral borderland of great cities. If an entirely hostile reading of his final decision is possible, it is because Angel has always been morally ambiguous. And if the last episode of the television show, which is in the end all about him, is titled in a reference to one of the most amoral of rock bands, it is because part of the point of the show has always been to teach us sympathy for the devil.

Dedicated to the memory of Selena Ulrich.

NOTES

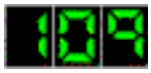
1 Joss Whedon has stated that a sixth season would have dealt with the chaos after the system is smashed, *Angel News*, 18 May 2004, cited at www.whedonesque.com; David Fury that it would have been their attempt to re-invent the series as *The Road War-rior*/(*Mad Max*), 'Sixth Sense', interview by Tara Dilullo, *DreamWatch*, 118 (2004), p. 32; Jeffrey Bell has mentioned that it would have continued the arc of Illyria's acceptance of her now double nature as Illyria/Fred, *Official Angel Magazine*, 4 (2004), cited at www. whedonesque.com.

2 In conversation.

3 Perhaps the most obscure of these comes during Angel's hallucinations in 'Soul Purpose' (5010) where Fred removes his soul from his chest in the shape of a goldfish in a dirty bowl. Back in Season Two of Buffy, in 'Passion' (B2017), Angelus tormented Willow by killing her goldfish. The soul is the thing that stops Angel being the Angelus that does such things, and is so represented as the least of his victims. Angel's soul when restored, in 'Becoming Pt. 2' (B2022), and when removed in *Angel*'s fourth season, is held in a globe that shines brightly; Angel is worried that his pragmatic compromise with evil has soiled him irredeemably – Fred talks of simply flushing fish and water away.

4 After his heroic self-sacrifice in 'Chosen' (B7022)

5 However, remarks by Alexis Denisof in interview that he likes the character of Wesley so much that he would always be prepared to play him again may indicate that this self-sacrificing death, like Spike's, may not be all it seems, 'Parting Gifts: Interview with Alexis Denisof', *Official Angel Magazine*, 13 (2004), pp. 10–16.



4.4
THE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUFFY STUDIES
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Margaret Bates, Emily M. Gustafson, Bryan C. Porterfield, Lawrence B. Rosenfeld

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"When Exactly Did Your Sister Get Unbelievably Scary?"

Outsider Status and Dawn and Spike's Relationship

We would like to thank Mark Gileau, Vivian Burr, Elizabeth Rambo and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions. Address correspondence to the fourth author at: Department of Communication Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, 27599-3285 (email: lbr@unc.edu).

(1) We argue in this paper that Dawn and Spike's supportive relationship was based on their shared Outsider status and, while their bond was real and valuable at the time that their relationship flourished, it was only temporary, ending (in some ways but not others) when Dawn became an accepted member of the Scooby gang, making her an Insider. The concept of Outsider, used to describe individuals excluded from the mainstream society, includes the notions of liminality, marginality, and Othering.

Outsiders and Insiders: Dawn and Spike as Outsiders

(2) The concept of Outsider is not based on a simple dichotomy of either being in or out of a group. Being on the inside or outside of a group is situational and fluctuates depending upon the social, political, and cultural values of a given social context; therefore, an individual can occupy the insider position at one moment and the outsider position the next (Kusow, 2003). Being an Outsider is a malleable title that can be changed to Insider based on the situation in which the two different groups are interacting. Additionally, it is possible to be both

an Insider in one group and an Outsider to another at the same time (Vergehese, 1995).

(3) For example, Elizabeth Atkinson (2001) writes about manipulating her status as Insider or Outsider depending on the situation she is in and whether being a member of a particular group would be useful. She is many things all at once: a heterosexual woman who in her later years became a lesbian, a professor who taught while earning her graduate degree (making her both teacher and student), and a mother who was also a salaried professional. In regard to her identity as a lesbian, she writes about concealing or revealing this aspect of her identity based on when it would be most advantageous to her.

(4) In Spike and Dawn's case, their outsider status is not nearly as simple to manipulate as Atkinson's. The group both are trying to infiltrate or join, the Scoobies, know them intimately or, at least, know what they are. So, Spike cannot pass for human and Dawn cannot pass for human, older or more mature than she is.

(5) This flexibility in Insider-Outsider status accounts for why sometimes even a Scooby finds himself or herself excluded from the gang. For example, in "The Zeppo" (3013), the one excluded is Xander; in several episodes (e.g., "Where the Wild Things Are," 4018, and "Hell's Bells," 6016 through to "Selfless," 7005) it is Anya, mostly because of her return to vengeance demon status; and Buffy herself is excluded from the group in many episodes, such as "When She Was Bad" (2001), "Anne" (3001), "Dead Man's Party" (3002), "Dead Things" (6013), and "Bargaining, pt. 2" (6002). The most obvious of all Buffy's exclusions takes place in "Empty Places" (7019), in which she is voted off Revello Drive.

(6) Achieving Insider status means having privileged access to important information, to people at the center of things, and to power (Page, 1999; Stamper & Masterson, 2002). In the case of the Scoobies, this power is two-fold. First, it is the more obvious power that they have in regard to saving the world. For example, in "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" (1011), Cordelia begrudgingly comes to Buffy for protection: Buffy and her gang may not be Cordelia's social peers (yet), but they are the ones she knows can keep her safe. Similarly, in "Doomed" (4011), Riley is understandably upset by the prospect of the end of the world while, in contrast, the Scoobies all respond to Giles's warning with a bored, "Again?"

(7) The power the Scoobies have to save the world is simultaneously an integral part of their identity and the most important power a

resident of Sunnydale can possess. Therefore, it is not surprising when the Scoobies show their one-up status as evil fighters in comparison to the Initiative in “Primeval” (4021). Buffy points out to one of the protesting officers that, “This isn’t your business. It’s mine. You, the Initiative, the suits in the Pentagon . . . you’re all messing with primeval forces you can’t begin to understand. I’m the Slayer. And you’re playing on my turf.” And, with Scoobies in tow and aiding her with the enjoining spell, Buffy defeats Adam.

(8) Unfortunately, the power to save the world is unrelated to social acceptability (especially in high school where Willow and Xander, for example, were targets of derision from the Cordettes and others), so the second source of power a Scoobie Insider has access to is social support and friendship. This is something envied by many Outsiders, such as Faith. In “End of Days” (7021), Faith tries to explain her envy to Buffy:

FAITH: So, here's the laugh riot. My whole life I've been a loner.
BUFFY: That's the funny part? Did I miss something? . . .
> FAITH: OK. The point. Me, by myself all the time. I'm looking at you, everything you have, and, I don't know, jealous. . . .
> BUFFY: I love my friends. I'm very grateful for them. . . .

(9) Spike and Dawn are both trying to become Scooby Insiders. In Spike’s case, the original reason was not so much to be part of the Scoobies and their social network as it was to become intimate with Buffy. Both, however, eventually want to be part of the Scoobies, socially and as equal partners in their plans. Spike, except in Season 7, did not have a vested interest in the world-saving part of Scooby society—defending Dawn against Glory, for instance, was done out of affection for both her and Buffy and his desire to do anything to keep Buffy from being hurt (“Intervention,” 5018). He is, however, upset—feeling perhaps betrayed—in “Afterlife” (6003) by being excluded from the Scoobies’ resurrection plans:

SPIKE: You didn't tell me. You brought her back and you didn't tell me.
XANDER: Well, now you know.
SPIKE: I worked beside you all summer.
XANDER: We didn't tell you. It was just . . . we didn't, okay?

(10) Dawn—from her arrival in “Buffy vs. Dracula” (5001) until “Grave” (6022)—is not considered a part of the Scooby gang, even with its greatly expanded membership which, according to Riess (2004), includes eight members in Season 5, counting Spike (which is certainly arguable—and with which we disagree). Viewed as a chore,

as someone to be protected, she is forbidden from participating in the central Scooby activities of research and patrolling. “When can I go patrolling?” she asks her sister in “Fool for Love” (5007), and Buffy pointedly responds, “Not until you are . . . never.” This exclusion persists until Buffy allows Dawn to help her sword fight in “Grave.” Of course, by the end of Season 6, Anya and Willow had defected and Tara had been murdered, so there no longer was a cohesive Scooby gang from which to exclude Dawn.

(11) Dawn’s exclusion also extended to personal matters. Although a high school student (the monks created her as a ninth grader), the Scoobies insist that she is too young to hear anything controversial, whether about her true origin or about sex (e.g., in “Once More with Feeling,” 6007, Buffy chastises Xander for alluding to Willow and Tara’s Sapphic intentions in front of her sister). Excluded from shared activities and “adult” discussions, Dawn feels isolated and lonely. In “Older and Far Away” (6014), she complains to her sister, “You don’t know! You have this thing you do. You have all these friends. You have no idea what it’s like [being alone].” Similarly, in “Once More with Feeling” (6007), she laments—in a song that lasts only a few seconds and consists of just two lines—”Does anybody even notice? Does anybody even care?”

(12) Despite Dawn’s exclusion, she is precious to the Scoobies. She is allowed to hang out with them at the Magic Box, even if she is forbidden to help with their research, and she is invited to most Scooby social functions, such as Buffy’s and Tara’s birthday parties. In contrast, Spike is generally despised by the Scoobies and is rarely seen in their company; most of his interactions involve following Buffy along on paired patrols. Even during their intimate relationship in Season 6, Buffy does not allow him to become a part of her social circle. His status as Outsider is so firmly established that he is not invited to Buffy’s birthday party and is forced to crash it. Even after his voluntary ensoulment, he is distrusted by the Scoobies, so much so that Giles, in Season 7, tries to have him killed. Thus, though both Dawn and Spike are Outsiders, the degree to which they are excluded from the Insider Scoobies varies.

Dawn and Spike’s Marginality

(13) The term *marginality* was first introduced by sociologist Everett Stonequist (1937) to describe individuals separate from the dominant group, the dominant culture, because of their gender, race, class, or other characteristics (Miller, 1991). (Stonequist studied marginalization as it applied to different ethnic groups trying to

acculturate to a predominately white, Christian, American society.) Marginality does not mean the same thing as minority, a term that refers to numbers; marginality has to do with power and control, with those who are marginalized excluded from both (e.g., women in the U. S. are a majority, but in many ways are marginalized from the dominant male culture).

(14) A marginalized individual, aware that he or she is a member of an "other" group, undergoes a crisis in which his or her identity is destroyed and then reconstructed. If this reconstruction is successful, the marginalized individual may be accepted into the dominant culture. The ability to transcend the barrier between accepted culture and the margins depends on several factors, including the individual's age at the onset of crisis, the degree of cultural difference between individual and dominant culture, the amount of prejudice encountered by the individual, and the chances she or he receives to be included in the dominant culture. Those who successfully make the transition may abandon the beliefs of their old culture in favor of the beliefs held by the members of the dominant culture (Berry, 1993; Neto, 2001). Those who are unsuccessful may cycle between the two cultures throughout their lives or never be accepted by the dominant group.

(15) Marginalized individuals feel torn between two identities and struggle to decide whether to follow the traditions of their own group or those of the dominant group. This conflict leads to ambivalence, and it is likely that they will adopt a behavioral system that is an incongruous mixture of the two cultures between which they are torn. Typically, marginalized individuals become psychologically maladjusted, engaging in delinquent behavior and feeling a strong sense of hatred towards themselves and their group. However, they also are often perceptive introverts who show a preference for writing and a conscientiousness that leads them to be bluntly honest with one another and with members of the dominant culture.

(16) While their degree of separation from the Insiders varies, Dawn and Spike are both marginalized beings. Unlike Stonequist's (1937) examples, the two are members of a rare minority: the non-human group. Spike, a vampire, and Dawn, a mystical being called the Key, are both trying to integrate into human society represented by the Scoobies. As a result, they display three of the characteristics of Stonequist's marginalized individual.

(17) First, both act ambivalently towards the two societies to which they belong, vacillating between rejecting human culture and rejecting demon/vampire culture. For example, when Dawn first discovers her

true nature, she rejects the comfort of the Scoobies and instead seeks out Spike, a fellow non-human, for comfort. In “Crush” (5014), she confides in him that she “feel[s] safe” with him, while at the same time she feels separated from her former companions, the Scoobies. After discovering her role as the Key, she alternates between periods of assisting the Scoobies and engaging in delinquent behavior with Spike (e.g., breaking into the Magic Box).

(18) Spike not only rejects the company of demons and vampires, but goes so far as to kill his own kind. He is torn between doing evil and good (or at least less evil) deeds. In “Family” (5006), he originally goes to the Magic Box to watch Buffy be killed by Glory’s demons, but, eventually, rushes to her aid. Throughout the series he alternates between helping Buffy and hurting her. The clearest expression of this is in the song, “Walk Through the Fire,” in “Once More with Feeling," when he sings, “I hope she fries/I’m free if that bitch dies/I’d better help her out” and then later in the same song, sings, “First I’ll kill her, then I’ll save her,” followed a moment later by, “No, I’ll save her, then I’ll kill her.”

(19) Second, marginalized individuals often exhibit delinquent or self-destructive behavior when caught in the crisis of acculturation (Stonequist, 1937). Dawn, especially during Season 6, exhibits a host of delinquent behaviors: she shoplifts, lies, skips school, and fails classes. Both she and Spike engage in self-destructive behaviors. In “Blood Ties” (5013), for example, after learning she is the Key, Dawn mutilates her arm with a kitchen knife, and Spike, upon his return from Africa, claws at his chest in hopes of removing “the spark.” Additionally, Spike’s primary coping mechanism, drinking, is another example of his self-destructive, self-loathing behavior.

(20) Third, both Spike and Dawn are highly self-conscious and perceptive. Like other people of marginal status, they are writers—William wrote poetry and Dawn throughout Season 5 keeps a journal—and a perceptive Dawn is the first to realize (or at least verbalize) that Spike has a crush on Buffy: “Oh come on. You didn’t notice? Buffy, Spike is completely in love with you” (“Crush,” 5014). Spike is equally perceptive; for example, he understands slayer nature better than Buffy does (Riess, 2004). In “Fool for Love,” he explains to Buffy, “Every slayer . . . has a death wish. . . . The only reason you’ve lasted as long as you have is you’ve got ties to the world.”

Dawn and Spike’s Liminal Status

(21) Marginalized people inhabit a liminal space that Ortner (1996)

calls the “borderlands,” a term which describes “the construction of complex, hybridized identities for those who must live within, yet are excluded from, the dominant cultural order” (p. 181). *Limen* comes from the Latin for threshold and *liminality* implies a transition across a threshold and across boundaries (Couldry, 2003).

(22) Turner (1974) viewed liminality as more than just a phase or transition period. There exist individuals, groups, or social categories for which the liminal moment becomes the permanent position. One could become stuck in the liminal location between the “two worlds,” unable to move forward to the “new” or retreat to the “old” (Higgot & Nossal, 1997). The deeper and more irreconcilable the contradictions between the two worlds, the more likely the person in a liminal location will be fixed there: having changed identity sufficiently to sample the new, albeit across a threshold, there is no turning back. The contradictions between the two worlds, however, can prevent a full threshold crossing.

(23) In Spike’s case, his degree of difference from the Scoobies is great enough to prevent him from ever successfully crossing the threshold into their world. For instance, in “Family," he helps to save Buffy and the Scoobies from Glory’s demons after Tara’s spell backfires. He has helped the Scoobies before, but almost always for money or other incentives. This is the first time he does it voluntarily. By helping out at opportune times, refraining from killing the Slayer, and by socializing with the Scoobies (e.g., playing pool and commiserating with Xander about women in “Triangle,” 5011, and inviting himself to Scooby social events like Buffy’s birthday party in “Older and Far Away,” 6014), he separates himself from other vampires (see “Fool for Love,” 5007, “Listening to Fear,” 5009, and “Triangle,” 5011). He, however, does not become a full-fledged Scooby. Moreover, he only becomes acceptable to Buffy after he gets a soul. He recognizes his trapped, liminal status when he laments to Clem in “Seeing Red” (6019):

SPIKE: You know, everything used to be so clear. Slayer. Vampire. Vampire kills Slayer, sucks her dry, picks his teeth with her bones. It's always been that way. I've tasted the life of two Slayers. But with Buffy . . . [grimacing in anguish] It isn't supposed to be this way! [He grabs a piece of furniture and shoves it over, with accompanying crashing noises.] (angrily) It's the chip! Steel and wires and silicon. (sighs) It won't let me be a monster. (quietly) And I can't be a man. I'm nothing.

(24) When and if someone in a liminal space completes his or her rite

of passage, he or she is the first one to recognize it. Granted, true passage through the liminal location does require an acceptance back into society as a whole. At the same time, however, a person in a liminal space reaches the point of “I am enough” (Quashie, 2004). He or she recognizes his or her progress and strives to complete his or her rite of passage not because of what the rest of society believes he or she should or should not do, but because the transition and the process are important to how he or she views self. The person reaches a point where pleasing others, showing off to them, or gaining their approval are unimportant.

(25) Dawn has several moments of “I am enough” in Season 7. In “Potential” (7012), for example, she has accepted her place in the Scoobies and, more importantly, her relation to her sister. The episode ends with her researching quietly at the living room table, while Buffy has taken the real Potentials out for training. Having renounced her claim to be a Potential without complaint, she settles back into the role of Watcher Junior. Similarly, in “Chosen” (7022), she returns to Sunnydale and confronts her sister and makes her own decision and effort to be present against the First. She fights whether or not the Scoobies (in their overprotective zeal) approve.

(26) Similarly, in “Chosen," Spike has his own “I am enough” moment. Had he been wearing the necklace merely as a way to curry Buffy’s favor or to make her love him, he would have taken it off and left the Hellmouth with her after she told him she loved him. Instead, he stays to finish what he started, recognizing that he has “got to do this.” Again, like Dawn, the action is not for someone else’s approval but because it is something he needs to do as a rite of passage.

(27) Liminality is more than just a process of transgressing boundaries: it is a process of uncovering one’s true nature (Juschka, 2003; Quahsie, 2004). After shedding one’s previous identity while in the liminal location, one is able to uncover her or his social self. This social self is a self that is unfettered by history, gender, race, or class, and that is the self that becomes evident in the communitas (Juschka, 2003). Reaching a new stage or position in society after passing through the liminal stage (if one can successfully transcend this stage at all) is not a process of creation. Instead, it is based on reconnecting with and uncovering one’s true nature. It is a process of shedding old identity trappings and surrendering the markers of social identity and status (Quashie, 2004).1

Dawn and Spike as Other

(28) The third component of Outsider status includes the notion of the Other (Canales, 2000; Rose, 2002; Sartre, 1965). Othering, or "differing," refers to an ideology that sanctifies the dominant culture while devaluing those individuals who do not fit the definition of the dominant group. Othering is a perceptual and philosophical process in which the Other can only be defined by what it is not: the Self (Riggins, 1997; Sartre, 1965), that is, the Other is "not me." The Other exists as a distorted reflection of the Self, and it is from this contrast that the Self learns about its own character. Othering is a way of securing one's own identity through the stigmatization of an Other, creating categories of "us" and "them," which, in the Buffyverse, usually means "humans" and "non-humans."

(29) Othering, as a process, reinforces power relationships. Constructing an Other means having something from which one can distance oneself—a something that is inferior and fundamentally unlike the Self—something abhorrent and/or in need of protection (Weis, 2003). Othering, therefore, is a process intended to reinforce and reproduce positions of subordination and domination (Johnson et al., 2004). It is a concept that reflects spheres of power relationships in which one of the two interactants is always perceived as more powerful than the inferior Other (Krumer-Nevo, 2002). When an individual is relegated to Other status, she or he is relegated to the position of being an object: subjectivity is stripped away and she or he is cast aside to the fringes of society as a way to prevent her or him from challenging the social order (Maccallum, 2002).

(30) As is the case with the Insider-Outsider relationship, the Self-Other relationship is an active process that is relational, interactive, co-constructed, and based upon the interaction of two reciprocal social images (Krumer-Nevo, 2002; Quashie, 2004; Weis, 2003). Everyone, at some time, has been cast as the Other (Quashie, 2004)—it is a universal experience, a moment of vulnerability we all encounter. For example, each member of the Scoobies has been considered Other in relation to someone else's idea of Self, whether concerning Willow's sexuality, Buffy's position as the Slayer, Xander's lack of popularity or higher education, or Giles's age and country of origin.

(31) In this analysis, we are looking at an Othering that sets both Spike and Dawn apart from the Scooby society as a whole and, as a result, draws the two together in friendship. In this self-other relationship, Spike and Dawn are positioned as inferior to the Scoobies. Spike is inferior because he is a monster and evil and thus merits the abhorrence of the Scoobies. He is objectified by his nature. Perhaps the most blatant abuse of his reduced, object status is during

his and Buffy's affair in Season 6. However, he is used by the Scoobies for a variety of purposes throughout the series. In Season 4, he is kept alive (though bound and as a hostage or "guestage," as Andrew would say) because the Scoobies need his information about the Initiative. He is an object to them, something that can be used; not an individual. (Though, in this example, it is important to recognize the symbiotic relationship, since Spike needs the blood the Scoobies provide him to survive and he needs the Slayer's protection from the soldiers.) During the summer after "The Gift" (5022) and into the fall (as seen in "Bargaining, pt 1," 6001), the Scoobies again abuse and take advantage of Other Spike. He is the muscle. He is no more a part of their society or their team than the Buffybot. He is, once again, merely tolerated because his strength can be substituted for the late Slayer's.

(32) Dawn's Otherness, her rendering as object, is different. Except for the open hostility and mistrust by Buffy in "No Place Like Home" (5005)—the episode in which Buffy, using a spell that allows her to perceive Dawn's true nature as the Key, accosts Dawn, demanding "*What* are you?"—Dawn is not treated with abhorrence by either her sister, her mother, or by the Scooby Gang, although there is an undercurrent of awkwardness between Dawn and the Scoobies once they are told of her origin ("Blood Ties," 5013). She is, however, treated as an object that must be protected. This is seen most often in her relation to Buffy throughout Seasons 5 and 6. For example, in "Real Me" (5002), Dawn must close her eyes so she doesn't witness any slaying; in "Blood Ties," Buffy and Giles conspire to keep her real identity a secret from her until she and Spike uncover it; and in "Villains" (6020), she is sent away to stay with Clem instead of being allowed to stay and try and help Willow. In "Entropy" (5018) she questions this treatment:

> DAWN: (smiling) No, you're not, it's not that, it's just . . . what if, instead of you hanging out with me? Maybe I could hang out with you.
> [Buffy stares blankly, not getting it.]
> DAWN: Why don't I come patrolling with you tonight?
> BUFFY: Oh. And then? Maybe we can invite over some strangers and ask them to feed you candy.
> DAWN: Well, you guys went out patrolling every night when you were my age.
> BUFFY: True . . . but technically, you're one-and-a-half.
> [Dawn gives her patented adolescent exasperated look.]
> BUFFY: See, I thought a little levity might . . . but okay, also no.
> DAWN: I just . . .I just think I could help.
> BUFFY: I'm sure you could. But it's a little more dangerous than

I had in mind.
DAWN: But . . . .
BUFFY: Dawn, I work very hard to keep you away from that stuff. Okay, I don't want you around dangerous things that can kill you.

(33) Buffy is not the only one protecting Dawn. In “Real Me,” Anya tries to prevent Dawn from heading out of the house because of the danger Harmony’s minions present. In that same episode, Anya treats Dawn condescendingly when she and Xander baby-sit, especially in regard to their board game choices. In “Forever” (5017), Tara and Willow treat Dawn condescendingly at first when they are put in charge of caring for her after Joyce’s funeral. When she wants to do magic, Willow offers to teach her something childish, such as, “making a stuffed animal float.” To their credit, especially Tara’s, the witches do explain to her why they cannot resurrect Joyce. Dawn does not get a “just because” reason but, instead, is informed that witches are not allowed to play around with life and death. She is still protected from the knowledge she seeks and eventually finds her own way around Tara’s warning (with Willow’s nudge).

(34) Othering is intimately related to our notion of who and what we are. The Other helps us to define ourselves, since we understand ourselves in relation to what we are not. By reducing the Other’s humanity, we emphasize our own (Maccallum, 2002). Buffy sets herself apart from Spike by pushing him away and by casting him into the role of Other. She tells him, “You don’t . . . have a soul! There is nothing good or clean in you. You are dead inside! You can’t feel anything *real*! I could never be your girl!” (“Dead Things,” 6013). He is fake, an inferior thing not worth her time or affection. And although her life is intimately tied to death and dying, as Spike points out to her (“Forever,” 5017), she does not view death the way vampires do (“Dead Things” 6013):

SPIKE: You are not throwing your life away over this.

BUFFY: It's not your choice.

SPIKE: Why are you doing this to yourself?

BUFFY: (tearful) A girl is dead because of me.

SPIKE: And how many people are alive because of you? How many have you saved? One dead girl doesn't tip the scale.

BUFFY: That's all it is to you, isn't it? Just another body!

(I can’t get this to single space, but all the previous blocked quotes have been single spaced.)

(35) Like Buffy, Xander goes to great lengths to separate himself from Spike and to dehumanize him. Many of his nicknames for Spike emphasize his Other status: Dead Boy, Jr., Blood Breath, and Willy Wannabite. In “Entropy” (6018), he confronts Anya and Spike outside the Magic Box:

XANDER: (still yelling at Anya) Oh, oh, oh, okay! You had to do it. Because he was there. Like Mt. Everest. (upset) Like I used to be.

ANYA: (angry) And then you weren't. You left me, Xander. At the altar. (yelling) I don't owe you anything.

XANDER: So you go out and bang the first body you can find? Dead or alive?

ANYA: Where do you get off judging me?!

XANDER: When this is your solution to our problems. I hurt you, and you hit me back? Very mature.

ANYA: No, the mature solution is for you to spend your whole life telling stupid, pointless jokes, so that no one will notice that you are just a scared, insecure little boy!

XANDER: (bitterly) I'm not joking now. You let that evil, soulless thing touch you. (pointing at Spike)

(Shouldn’t be so much space between this quote and the rest of the paragraph, but I can’t get rid of it.)Casting Spike as Other is crucial to Xander’s sense of identity. The woman he loves, his should-have-been-wife, has chosen the Other, the monster, over him. Xander degrades Spike in an effort to set his own world right again, a world in which he is the good, the virtuous, the human, and only Spike, the Other, does the hurtful things.

Dawn and Spike’s Relationship: A Community of Outsiders

Relationship Development

(36) Spike and Dawn form a relationship based on their shared status as Outsiders, and although each one is an Other for the other, their Othering of each other is more sympathetic and tolerant than the Scoobies' Othering of them. The result is a bond that empowers them both and allows them "to utilize the power within the relationship for transformation and coalition building" (Canales, 2000, p. 6). An example of this process is Spike and Dawn's joint mission to discover the means to resurrect Joyce. Spike attempts to understand Dawn's perspective, and this helps to bridge the gap between his Self point of view and Dawn's (at least to him) Other perspective. They join forces to hunt down the central ingredient for the resurrection spell and defeat the Ghora demon. Dawn emerges empowered from their partnership, no longer a teenage girl playing with dirt in a graveyard, but a "bitty Buffy" who fights at Spike's side against the huge, three-headed demon.

(37) From Dawn's perspective, she is the Self that is, to some degree, part of the overall Self-group of the Scoobies, the dominant society that segregates itself purposely from the inferior Others, the non-humans. She is partially accepted by that culture and understands that Self-perspective enough to reject its fundamental bigotry and accept Spike. As a result, she is the one most responsible for including Spike and "bringing him into Buffy's family circle" (Lorrah, 2003, p. 170).

(38) Within the construct of "communitas," Dawn and Spike's unexpected exchanges of a variety of types of social support gain a new foundation (e.g., they provide each other with emotional support, reality confirmation support, personal support, and emotional challenge support—see Richman, Rosenfeld, & Hardy, 1993, for a description of eight types of social support). Set apart from the dominant culture as not-quite-evil non-humans, they engage each other as equals and openly share themselves. Their shared understanding goes so deep that they are unable to deceive one another; for example, when Dawn tries to hide her plan to resurrect Joyce from Spike he tells her: "I know good and well what you're up to" ("Forever," 5017). Surprisingly, Spike does not dismiss as childish her desire to bring back her mother; instead, he honors her wishes and treats her with an equal's respect: "I'm not gonna tell, Little Bit. I'm gonna help."

(39) As marginalized beings, they are honest in their interactions, especially those with one another. In "Seeing Red," Dawn confronts Spike at his crypt after learning about his affairs with Anya and her sister. She speaks candidly with him and asks him bluntly if "it [the

one night stand] was worth it." He wants to continue moping, but Dawn insists on confronting him with his cowardice and selfishness: "Do you love her [Buffy]…Then how could you do that to her?" She is the one who reveals the truth to Spike about how deeply his selfish actions have hurt her sister. She is the force that holds him accountable for his indiscretions and prompts him to return to Revello Drive to apologize.

(40) Like other marginalized beings, Spike and Dawn suffer a loss of identity, losses that in Season 5 allow them to relate to each other on an intimate level and to offer each other valuable social support. This aspect of their relationship parallels medical cases of professional women suffering from Traumatic Brain Injury: their coinciding trauma over identity loss was mitigated by the formation of relationships with fellow disabled women (Mukherjee, Reis, & Heller, 2003). These marginalized women formed a new community, one in which they gained a new sense of pride and empowerment from their interactions with people similarly afflicted. They also achieved breakthroughs in consciousness and, most importantly, regained the self-esteem lost by having an identity crisis.

(41) Similarly, Spike and Dawn help each other rebuild their identities, defining and discovering who they are through their joint interactions. Racked with guilt over Tara's being attacked by Glory, Dawn questions her nature to Spike and reveals her fear that she is an evil being. He tells her, confidently, "I know somethin' about evil. You're not evil" ("Tough Love," 5019). While Spike reassures Dawn of her identity, her unconditional acceptance of him helps him form a new identity. Rather than reacting to Spike with disgust and condescension like the Scoobies, she professes to Buffy: "I don't think Spike's icky . . . he's got cool hair, and he wears cool leather coats and stuff." Significantly, she adds: "And he doesn't treat me like an alien" ("Crush," 5014). Her acceptance helps Spike assume the "good guy" persona he uses when helping to protect Dawn and the Scoobies.

(42) Dawn and Spike understand and appreciate each other's marginality, which allows them to offer each other social support unavailable from relationships with those who do not share their particular Outsider status and liminal location. While it may be argued that each has ulterior motives (e.g., Spike's desire to impress Buffy), their instances of social support are offered without an expectation of reciprocation. In "Forever," when Spike's offer to help Dawn resurrect Joyce is met with skepticism and the assumption that he is trying to impress Buffy, he replies:

SPIKE: (firmly) Buffy never hears about this, okay? Found out what I was doing, she'd drive a redwood through my chest.

DAWN: Then, if you don't want credit, why are you helping me?

SPIKE: (quietly) I just don't like to see Summers women take it so hard on the chin, is all. (angrily) And I'm dead serious. You breathe a word of this to Buffy, I'll see to it that *you* end up in the ground. Got it?

DAWN: Yeah. Got it.

(No spaces between these lines of quotes.)

His motive is to help Dawn in her grief, however perilous the end result may be. His concern is for Dawn's well-being, with no expectation for a reward: theirs is a communal friendship.

Relationship Disintegration

(43) Spike and Dawn's mutually supportive dyadic relationship ends (although their relationship itself does not end but evolves, especially in Season 7) as Dawn's status as Outsider changes, as she joins the fold of the Scooby gang (Riess, 2004, lists Dawn as a member of the Scooby gang in her summaries of Seasons 6 and 7). During the episode "Grave," Buffy realizes that Dawn is growing up and that she already is caught up in all of the Scoobies' problems. Rather than excluding her for being both non-human and too young to defend herself, Buffy realizes, "I got it so wrong. I don't want to protect you from the world. I want to show it to you. There's so much I want to show you." Dawn's status as Outsider essentially ends, enabling her finally to be accepted by the Insiders, Buffy and her friends.

(44) But Dawn's transition out of her liminal location does not come without a price: her friendship with Spike. Spike's return from Africa is not welcomed by his former "Niblet." Instead, Dawn folds her arms and confronts him in "Beneath You" (7002), speaking to him with a "serious and cold stare":

DAWN: Spike. You sleep, right? You. Vampires. You sleep.

SPIKE: Yeah. What's your point, Niblet?

DAWN: Well, I can't take you in a fight or anything, even with a chip

in your head. But you do sleep. If you hurt my sister at all . . . touch her . . . you're gonna wake up on fire.

(No spaces.)

(45) Support and understanding have been replaced with threats. In the next scene, Spike asks Buffy: "When exactly did your sister get unbelievably scary?"

(46) Dawn understood clearly what Spike was before: a vampire without a soul (he remains soulless until the end of Season 6), and a brutal killer restrained from murdering her and those she knows by a penny-sized plate of silicon and a vampire-slaying ex-cheerleader. Why, then, does she suddenly abandon her pro-Spike stance after he, unsurprisingly, does something morally unacceptable? While it is possible that the major impetus for her shift in attitude is Spike's assault on her sister, part of her Season 7 anti-Spike stance comes from her becoming a member of the Insider group: her assimilation into the Scooby gang spells the end of her and Spike's supportive dyadic relationship.

(47) When adjusting to the cultural norms of a dominant society (i.e., acculturation), an individual has four options: separation (maintaining one's original cultural identity and group and withdrawing from the dominant society), integration (maintaining one's cultural identity while moving to become a part of the dominant society), assimilation (relinquishing one's original cultural identity and moving into the dominant society), and marginalization (losing the essential features of one's original culture, but not replacing them as a result of entering the dominant society) (Berry, 1993; Neto, 2001). Dawn's strategy is assimilation, leading her to accept the morality of the dominant culture: things without souls are evil, unacceptable, and need to be left outside the group. While it may be possible that Others are harmless (e.g., Clem and Spike with the chip), they are to be kept segregated and only consulted when one is either in desperate need of assistance or in a killing mood. Dawn has no place for Spike due to her newfound human-centric morality that has allowed her to be accepted into the circle of Scoobies. In her threat to Spike ("If you hurt my sister . . . you're gonna wake up on fire"), she verbally separates herself from her former friend by emphasizing his standing with his vampire brethren. The "you" here is plural (as in, "you vampires"), casting him into the role of Other and further removing him from the human majority of which she now considers herself a

member.

(48) The ability of an individual to successfully reintegrate into society often is dependent on the duration of her or his liminal status (Turner, 1974). Spike spent 120 years outside of human society, whereas Dawn (the teenage girl, not the Key) spent little more than a year excluded. Additionally, the reasons for their exclusion differed: Dawn was an innocent segregated from Scooby society both for her innocence and her non-human status; in contrast, Spike was a murderer who had tried multiple times to kill Buffy and her companions. Acceptance into the Insider, dominant society amounts to being “forgiven” (Turner, 1974, p. 260). As an innocent, it is easier for the Scoobies to “forgive” Dawn and integrate her into their culture and belief system than it is to “forgive” the Big Bad.

(49) Spike is always an Outsider; also, he is always available to form supportive dyadic relationships with others when they, too, are Outsiders. For example, Buffy and Spike’s first alliance in “Becoming, pt. 2” (2022) was the result of Buffy losing all her allies: Giles’s abduction, Kendra’s death, Xander and Willow’s injuries, and her own trouble with the police. She goes to Spike in Season 6, at first as a confidant (“Bargaining, pt. 2,” 6002, “Afterlife,” 6003, and “Life Serial,” 6005) because she cannot confide in her friends anymore. In “Touched” (7020), he is the only one to seek out Buffy and comfort her after her expulsion from Revello Drive (“Empty Places,” 7019). Similarly when Anya has Outsider status, she forms a supportive relationship with Spike, as seen in “Where the Wild Things Are” (4018) and “Entropy.” The first time, the two meet each other outside the Bronze: he is an Outsider not only to the Scoobies but to demon society since he can no longer kill humans, and she has had a disagreement with Xander and was not invited to go along with him to the frat party. The two sit together and commiserate about the “good old days” when they could kill humans and dole out vengeance, respectively. In “Entropy," the jilted vampire and the jilted demon find solace (through drunken sex) with one another.

(50) Although Spike’s dyadic relationships with others may signify their shared Outsider status, his Outsider status does not stop him from being a productive partner in dyadic relationships and, in the end, saving the world.

(51) On the other hand, in becoming a Scooby, Dawn’s strong ties to the dominant culture (filled with its variety of different, fully human members) integrate her into a new social network, thus rendering Spike’s social support less valued upon his return to her in “Beneath

You." Dawn's status as an Outsider is rescinded, while Spike's Outsider status remains intact. She can no longer feel the same appreciation for his situation. After being absorbed into the dominant group, she no longer needs the social support Spike provided in their once shared Outsiderhood.

(52) When exactly does Dawn become so unbelievably scary? It happens when she transcends the status boundary from Outsider to Insider.

Note

1 The idea that liminality only comes through a reduction of sorts, a divorce from one's former life or role before continuing onto a new role, reinforces our perspective of marginality. Thus, Quashie (2004) and Juschka's (2003) interpretation of the liminal applies to the marginalized as well. Perez Firmat (1986), on the other hand, blurs the line between the liminal and the marginal and categorizes them as variations of the same concept. To him, the liminal entity is the same as the one who exists in the "ragged margin" or the "margin of mess," the one stripped of a role at the center of society and thus forced to remain, at least for a time, on the periphery of society.

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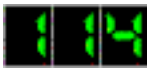

4.4
THE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUFFY STUDIES
Sixteen

Agnes B. Curry

Is Joss Becoming a Thomist? [*]

[1] When thinking about philosophical ideas exemplified in Joss Whedon's work, the medieval philosopher-theologian Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274) does not spring immediately to mind. Indeed, the only dialogue in a Whedon series that, to my knowledge, mentions Aquinas occurs in Season Four of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* in the episode "Beer Bad" (4004). [1] The reference is, predictably, dismissive. Buffy is in the early throes of her freshman year at UC Sunnydale. Heartsick after a one-night stand with Parker, a slick, faux-sensitive-guy campus player, Buffy allows a group of pretentiously intellectual upperclassmen to buy her some beer. As they sit in the pub drinking, the following dialogue occurs:

> Guy #1: The thing that the modern-day pundits fail to realize is that all the socioeconomic and psychological problems inherent to modern society can be solved by the judicious application of way too much beer.
> Guy #2: Black Frost is the only beer.
> Buffy: My mother always said beer is evil.
> Guy #1: Evil, good, these are moral absolutes that predate the fermentation of malt and fine hops. See . . . wait, where was I?
> Buffy: I'm really not sure.
> Guy #3: Well, Thomas Aquinas and . . . (he's interrupted by a chorus of "No's" from the group).
> Guy #2: No. There will be no Thomas Aquinas at this table.
> Guy #4: Keep your theology of Providence to yourself, frat boy. ("Beer Bad")

Nevertheless, I wish to argue that elements of Aquinas's philosophy are useful for understanding key moves in later seasons of the series, in particular seasons Six and Seven. While Season Six has been described as "remarkably religion-free" [2] and Season Seven is overtly hostile to religion, nevertheless there remain convergences with Thomistic ideas at the less obvious levels of metaphysics and moral psychology. These emerge when we consider the nature of evil in the later Buffyverse, the place of natural law, and the structure of human choice exemplified in major characters' actions. Additionally, later remarks made by Whedon in discussing *Firefly* ("Objects in Space Commentary," 1015), articulating his philosophical outlook make better sense in light of Thomism than in terms of Whedon's own Sartrean Existentialist interpretation. Examining seasons Six and Seven through the frame of Whedon's remarks about the mysteries of existence brings these Thomistic metaphysical and psychological themes to light. Therefore, I ask the reader's indulgence as we take what seems like a digression.

[2] We know that while Whedon admits a fascination for the Christian mythos [3] , he is an atheist. To my knowledge, Whedon's clearest acknowledgement of a specific philosophical outlook occurs when, in commenting on the final episode of *Firefly* ("Objects in Space"), he tells us that Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* is "the most important book I ever read." [4] Yet it is worth examining his description of what he takes from Sartre. Describing "an existential epiphany" occurring when he was sixteen, he notes: "I started to think for the first time in an adult fashion about life, about time, about reality, about dying, about all of the things that are right in front of us everyday, but that as children–- and often as adults–- we take for granted, or find some easy explanation for if we can. Um, in my case I was presented with the totality of things, um, but with no coherent pattern to put them in. I just suddenly understood that real life was happening" (Whedon, "Objects in Space Commentary").

[3] Note that this is an epiphany, not a crisis. It is a recognition of all that goes on right in front of us, of the fact that life is real and that it is happening. The experience Whedon describes is the same one posited by Aquinas and his commentators as the starting-point for metaphysics. [5] In spite of the daunting theological edifice that was Aquinas's own aim, the conceptual starting-point of his system is concrete and accessible to all. It is our ordinary human experience, of a world of material things, and of persons and other creatures interacting with those things. We know this world through sense-experience and active engagement with it. A basic experience is that

things are various and different from each other, yet insofar as they are real, *existing* things, they are the same. Thus, reflecting on our experience of things, we recognize that the meaning of something, *what* it is, is not the same as the fact that it *is.* In terms of metaphysical categories, there is a basic difference between essence and existence. As such, the existence (*esse*) of any thing is irreducible to its essence. Additionally, *esse*, as that which distinguishes a mere possibility from a reality, is an act or activity; the sense of act as a verb is crucial to notice. Commentator John Knasas explains: "Philosophical reflection discerns that the thing's existence is an act of the thing somewhat similarly as a man's running and speaking are other acts, though existential act is unique in its basicness and fundamentality to the thing." [6] With this in mind, let us return to Whedon's comments, in which he describes his reaction to reading *Nausea*:

> I did know that this book spoke to what I believe more accurately and truly than anything I had ever read. And what it talked about was the pain of being aware of things and their existence *outside* of their meaning, just the very fact of . . . objects . . . in space. That we cannot stop existence, we cannot stop change, we have to accept these things, and again if we see no grand plan in them, we have to accept them as existing completely on their own, and existing totally. . . . I do know there's a passage in the book that says, "Nothing can exist only slightly." And the protagonist is so overwhelmed by this, the fact that every piece of paper he picks up off the ground exists so completely, is so much there, it actually makes him nauseous, it makes his stomach hurt, it's too intense. [7] Um, for me, uh, it has a kind of rapture to it, and I find meaning in objects to be a *beautiful* thing because I have no plan to put them in. I find the meaning of the object to be with the object, both in however it's functional and the *fact* of its existence. A ball is to be thrown, but it's also just a round *thing*. (Whedon, ""Objects in Space Commentary")

The ball has functionality, which is partially a result of our assignment of meaning to it, and partially a result of some determinate features within itself (e.g. its roundness); most importantly, it has its own integrity as an existing thing. In this passage, Whedon draws one Sartrean conclusion, about the lack of a divine plan. But the other, about meaning*less*ness, is held only inconsistently, and with none of Sartre's disgust indeed Whedon characterizes his own general reaction as a kind of rapture. A meaning remains with the object; this is *not*

Sartre's famous experience of "the diversity of things, their individuality," as "only an appearance, a veneer" which can melt, "leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder–-naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness." [8]

[4] Sartre and Aquinas share an emphasis on the primacy of existence, but where Sartre saw monstrosity, Aquinas saw existence as "the guts, the perfection of everything." [9] On this understanding of Aquinas, the act of existence, of actuality, contains all perfections in a dynamic, outflowing and communicative way. To be anything is also to be in communicative relations with other things. Different creatures have different potentials for communication (and thus for understanding and attributing meanings to things) and different powers, but the basic dynamism is the ground of us all. As one commentator characterizes, "Existence is the central piece of the whole thing." [10] Following Aquinas to his own theological goal, we arrive at an understanding of God as the pure act of existence, and finite creatures as following from God's unlimited actuality. Following further, we arrive at a conception of evil as a peculiar sort of non-existence–-the lack of some perfection in an entity that should have it.

[5] At points in his remarks, Whedon stresses human acts of *imbuing* meanings to things. Discounting the science-fiction device of the spaceship as a "God ship" more powerful and knowing than its passengers, Whedon notes, "I'm just trying to get the audience to see people who are relating to the space, the objects, *only* on that level. Because ultimately what I'm saying about them is that they do have meaning, and it's the meaning we bring to them, and that's what makes *us* so extraordinary" (Whedon, ""Objects in Space Commentary"). It's the ability to imbue a grotesquely functional gun with the more benign meaning of a tree branch that distinguishes River as ". . . a good person" in contrast to the almost equally psychic and equally disconnected bounty hunter Early. Whedon continues in an extraordinarily non-Sartrean vein: "What makes objects so extraordinary is the *fact* of them, the very fact of them. It's mind-boggling. I believe that whether you have faith or not–-to think about consciousness, our ability to understand that these things exist and to think about the fact of existence" [11] (Whedon, ""Objects in Space Commentary").

[6] Things do touch; River's physical experiences of things in her "disassociative" brain state are possible because objects reach out to her as well. Unlike Sartre's protagonist, River does not recoil at being "very much a part of everything she touches" (Whedon,

“Commentary”). She moves in and out of presented and imbued meanings, striving to bring some good out of her situation. With this in mind, let’s return to Aquinas and the notion of essence. We can start by saying that essences, potentials for *what* things are (ball, round thing, tree branch, gun,) are patterns and structures that in crucial respects *limit* the dynamic outflowing of the primary act of existence. Some of these limits are inherent in the world itself; the roundness of the ball cannot be at the same time squareness, since matter will not accommodate these two patterns at the same time in the same place. Additionally, some contemporary interpreters of Aquinas emphasize the place of the human knower-actor in imbuing meanings in shifting, potentially endless ways. [12] Recognizing our own dynamic activity of positing meanings–-“what makes *us* so extraordinary” (Whedon, Commentary)–-prompts us to ask about the grounds for that activity itself. Interrogating our own drive to know, and seeing it as potentially endless, a Thomist would eventually arrive at an intellectual affirmation of Infinite Being in the context of a real world that in its own existence obscurely communicates that Being. But far from giving us a Pollyannaish picture of Providence, such an affirmation rests upon both insight and darkness–-it is “mind-boggling”–-and can be accompanied by both “pain” and “rapture.”

[7] Returning to a consideration of Whedon, I hope I have made it at least plausible that what Whedon pulls out of *Nausea* cannot be interpreted in a Sartrean vein either conceptually or affectively. Whedon does not affirm absurdity. While one may perhaps still argue that he is a kind of existentialist (less akin to Sartre and Camus than to their colleague Merleau-Ponty [13]) and I have no interest in claiming that he is a closet theist, [14] the most basic elements of his worldview fit a Thomist frame. Whedon is approaching Thomism not religiously but metaphysically, through recognition of the wondrous character of existence.

[8] Turning now to consider *BtVS,* there are additional elements later in the series that tip the balance away from Existentialism and toward Thomism. Clearly the Buffyverse has never been value-free or absurd. There are operative natural and supernatural laws, with which Buffy, her cohorts, and even the First [15] must comply. Granted, the situations of particular characters, such as Angel and Spike as ensouled vampires, Oz and Anya, Giles and Willow as murderers , reveal the poverty of dualist moral thinking and the need for what philosopher Martha Nussbaum would call a fine-grained perception of particulars, [16] as well as the moral failures of human beings and some inconsistency by the writers. [17] But underpinning the situational complexities of life in the Buffyverse are a few absolutes

that do “predate the fermentation of malt and fine hops” (“Beer Bad”). When Spike says, “That's the thing about magic. There's always consequences,” (“Afterlife,” 6003) he is affirming a precept that in the Buffyverse is universal, and that operates both physically and morally.

[9] Likewise, the overarching thematic about the nature of evil in the final two seasons exhibits a convergence with Thomistic themes. We are presented with two different meditations about evil as a privation, [18] as no specific sort of entity with its own determinate nature, but rather as a lack of some goodness that a thing by its nature should have.

[10] Season Six explores what this means on the human level. Greg Forster notes, and I agree, that the code of ethics underpinning the Buffyverse is ultimately eudaimonistic. [19] This is another convergence with Thomism, via Greek philosophy. In eudaimonism, humans are figured as seeking happiness, while happiness is understood as the attainment of those things that are genuinely good for oneself, as opposed to those things that only seem to be good. Thus, along with eudaimonism comes a theory of human nature and of the fulfillment of one’s nature. For Aquinas we are ordered ultimately to God. While we are free to make various choices about the means of attaining the final end, we are not free with respect to the end itself. Humans naturally and necessarily seek for their happiness. [20] Ultimately, happiness is the attainment of the Perfect Good, i.e. the beatific vision (ST 1-2.5.2: II.609). An implication of this view is that the will is ordered to the good and “can tend to nothing except under the aspect of good” (ST 1.82.3: 1.414). For Aquinas, sin results not because we choose evil *as* evil, because that is impossible, but rather because we choose a good relative to us in place of a greater good. Such a choice is not a mere mistake, due to lack of information or the like, but rather an irrational failure to obey the dictates of one’s own conscience as to the ordering of goods. Such a choice is often incredibly damaging and horrific. But it remains that one chooses under an aspect of good.

[11] Leaving the question of the Perfect Good out of the picture, let’s apply this to Season Six. In Season Six all the villains are human. And what is sobering (or perhaps annoying, depending on your perspective) is how badly most of the characters do in their choices. I will focus on the “Big Bads” of the season first, then consider Xander, and indirectly, Anya. Buffy’s situation after her involuntary resurrection is clearly crucial, but worthy of a more extended discussion than I can give here. I just suggest that the development of

her relationship with Spike through Season Seven subverts a straightforward Sartrean analysis of its sadomasochistic elements, and I believe it can be accommodated within a Thomistic frame.

[12] Clearly the members of the Trio think they are enamored with evil and claim to be evil. Their schemes center around harassing Buffy, coming by money, and finding ways to manipulate women. But what they really want is to avoid the difficult work of growing up, of facing themselves, risking abandonment, and slogging through the inevitable stages of life. In Thomistic terms, we could say that what's really going on here is that they are pursuing a relative good--the superficial trappings of adulthood--rather than the greater good of genuine adulthood. Their most damaging acts--of cruelty and rage in the case of Warren, of betrayal and cowardice by Andrew and Jonathon--are wrought by each individual's insecurity about his value to others. This insecurity can be understood as a result of their failure to choose the first good and gives rise to a set of compensating choices to pursue power over others. Thus their first set of choices only exacerbates their insecurities, setting up the stage for greater corruption. Even the First, in the guise of the Master, notes that part of the point of the journey is "to learn something about ourselves in the process" ("Lessons," 7001).

[13] Willow is the bigger bad of the season, and while much has been said about her arc being a metaphor for addiction, her decision structure is the same. Magic becomes an easy means to attain goods that while genuine, must be fully understood in their contexts. To avoid the risk of losing Tara by letting her see her deep insecurities, an event which must occur if they are to establish the greater good of genuine intimacy, she uses forgetting spells with variously disastrous effects. This can be understood in Thomistic terms as choosing the more immediate, lesser good (a peaceful life with Tara now) over the more remote, greater good (a genuine intimacy with her). Upon Tara's death Willow's inability to handle her painful emotions, resultant in part from a lack of practice, is partly what prompts her to seek the immediate satisfaction of action. Squaring off with Giles she hijacks the power loaned him by the coven. But as it contains "the true essence of magic" (the communicativeness and interconnectedness of Being), she gets more than she bargained for when she is confronted with the reality of others' pain:

> WILLOW: It's incredible. (panting) I mean, I am so juiced . . . Giles, it's like . . . no . . . mortal person has . . . ever had . . . this much power. Ever. It's like I, I'm connected to everything . . . I can feel . . . it feels like . . .

I . . . I can feel. . . (She pauses and her smile begins to fade.) . . .everyone. Oh. Oh my God. All the emotion. All the pain. No, it, it's too much. It's just too much.
GILES: (weakly) Willow . . . It doesn't have to be . . . like that. You . . . you can stop it.
WILLOW: (panting) Yeah. I, I can. I have to stop this. (getting up) I'll make it go away.
GILES: Willow. . . .
WILLOW: Oh, you poor bastards! (“Grave,” 6022) [21]

Later, addressing Buffy, Willow taunts her:

WILLOW: For all your fighting . . . thinking you're saving the world . . . (Cut back to the pit. Buffy listens in amazement.)
DAWN: Buffy? (Buffy puts up a hand to silence Dawn.)
WILLOW: And in the end . . . I'm the only one that can save it.
BUFFY: By killing us?
WILLOW: It's the only way to stop the pain.

Even her final, nihilistic and clearly irrational choice is framed in terms of a relative good, that of ending pain.

[14] Xander functions somewhat as “everyman” in the series, as he is the only recurring character who is not exceptional, either by virtue of supernatural origins or powers, or outstanding intelligence. While he does not rise to the stature of a Big Bad in Season Six, he manages to do terribly by leaving Anya at the altar. Or, more precisely, standing her up is the clumsy correction for a previous series of wrong choices. His situation illustrates for us the difficulty of ours--we live an unpredictable mixture of clarity and obscurities, some internally generated, some externally induced. While the Xander-Anya relationship has some very nice depth to it, and it helps each character to grow, it remains that neither is ready to marry. While she does love him, the only-recently humanized Anya is also clinging to Xander in order to avoid the work of finding out for herself what it now means for her to be human. And Xander will never succeed in a relationship until he confronts the damage of his home life. Xander’s action on his wedding day was, arguably, the better thing to do given his recognition that they shouldn’t marry. His sin was in suppressing the voice of his conscience in the months before. As he tells Anya: “It wasn't you. (sighs) It wasn't you I was hating. (pauses) I had these thoughts, and . . . fears before this” [22] (“Hell’s Bells,” 6016). Xander

chose, like Willow, the more immediate good of life today with Anya (and giving in to her pressure to marry) over the delayed, but greater good of a relationship involving more self-understanding.

[15] What about the picture of moral choice in Season Seven? In his analysis of Season Seven, James South [23] shows how it uses the Platonic metaphor of the cave in various ways. One of Plato's aims in the Allegory of the cave is to emphasize how our choices are distorted by desire-induced fantasies. [24] South argues, convincingly, that the Hellmouth alludes to Plato's cave, and that the story arcs of Willow, Anya, Spike, and Buffy are meditations on the sources and variety of such fantasies. Willow, Anya, and Buffy manage to escape the cave when they recognize how their fantasies have distorted their comprehension, while Spike escapes only partially. Thus far, South's analysis converges with mine; a Thomist perspective can make sense of both desire-induced fantasies and the experience of seeing through those fantasies. So I won't belabor the point about evil at the level of individual choices. But South raises the further point that the Platonic metaphor, and the accompanying teleological model of reality, are themselves desire-induced fantasies. As an explanation of bad behavior that situates it within a framework of overarching goodness, it provides us with a comforting story. He understands the latter part of Season Seven as a subversion of the Platonic teleology. Insofar as Aquinas's understanding likewise assumes an underlying teleology, in continuing with my examination of Season Seven it will be important to consider whether my interpretation falls prey to fantasy.

[16] While Season Six explores evil at the human level, Season Seven moves to a cosmological frame. In what seems like a clear attempt to reject any sort of Christian reading of the Buffyverse, we learn that the First is, well, first. As the First in the guise of the Master tells Spike in the opening episode, we're going "Right back to the beginning. Not the Bang. Not the Word. The true beginning" ("Lessons"). By specifically discounting the Bang and the Word as heralding the "true beginning," I think the First is claiming primordiality, perhaps even priority. At first it seems like maybe things are setting up for some sort of Manichean model, or, more interestingly, a view of evil as the ground of reality. But what we get is a situation where the First's story cannot be the whole story of the First. We get, appropriately enough, a half-truth. And we get a teller--an entity that yearns to communicate. The power of the First, while formidable, is also always parasitic. Giles instructs, "it only works through those it manipulates" ("Bring on the Night," 7.10) and this entails the prior existence of creatures to be manipulated. While "it has eternities to act, endless resources," it could not have been the

one to have created those resources, for it remains unable to take corporeal form except “in the guise of someone who’s passed away” (“Bring on the Night,” 7010). Even then, it remains generally a figment, invisible except to those it is actively manipulating. It yearns for incarnation; discussing the possibilities for (in this case, sexual) contact enjoyed by humans, the First/Buffy admits, “I envy them. Isn’t that the strangest thing?” (“Touched,” 7020).

[17] Interestingly, the First gains efficacy by exploiting others’ power, as in the case of its momentary possession of Willow, and by mining the disappointments, fears, insecurities and yearnings that Season Six has explored. Aquinas notes, “what evil is must be known from the nature of good” (ST 1.48.1: 1.248-9). Although it is “nothing” in the sense of not having a determinate nature of its own, evil is not an illusion and the resources for evil are as immense as Creation. What we find out in experiencing evil is the immense potential for darkness in existent things, especially humans but perhaps other beings as well. We see how far beings can fall away from the good, and the horrible damage that can ensue. But even this, horrific as it is, also tells us indirectly about what those various sorts of beings are or were, and about the dynamism--the power and energy--of existence. Returning to *Buffy,* the fact that the First remains largely unknown cannot simply be that “it predates any written history, and it rarely show its true face” (“Bring on the Night,” 7010). At the risk of implying that Giles is wrong, perhaps, as an entity given over entirely to evil, the First *has* no single, true face, as evil “itself” has no independent form or nature of its own (ST 1.48.1: 1.248-9). As the First/Mayor tells Faith, “Nobody’s explained to you how this works, have they? You see, I am part of The First, as you kids call it, but I’m also me. Richard Wilkins III, late mayor and founder of Sunnydale” (“Touched,” 7.20). [25] That its efficacy remains parasitic on the capacities of those it manipulates is suggested in the exchange between Faith and Wood after Faith’s encounter with the First/Mayor:

> FAITH: I’m so pissed off at myself. I knew it was a trick . . .
> WOOD: So did I but I still wanted my mother to hold me like a little baby. (off her look) In a manly way, of course.
> FAITH: (smiles) Of course.
> WOOD: Listen, nobody wants to be alone, Faith. We all want someone who cares, to be touched that way. I mean, the First may deal in figments but that wanting is real. (“Touched")

As the apotheosis of evil, the First cannot be known directly, only indirectly, through the myriad possibilities of those whose

resources it can hijack. I should note that there is a possible counter-example to this idea in “End of Days” (7021) when the First and Caleb merge. The guise of a dead person is dropped and a monstrous form appears. And there is a transfusion of power that manifests in Caleb in the form of physical strength. Nevertheless, it remains unclear the extent to which it is Caleb’s own desires for a “sacred” experience that structure the encounter. When the First appears as Buffy, the entity seems to take on not only the form but the persona, and as Buffy the First engages in flirtatious banter. When Caleb indicates his discomfort and reminds the First/Buffy that it is a sacred experience for him, she responds, “And for me as well,” but in a decidedly bored manner (“End of Days”). While I would not go so far as to say that Caleb ravishes himself, I suggest that it is his wanting, no less than Faith’s or Wood’s, that dictates the form his experience with the First will take. And while the First has a consistency in its aims, it is likewise unclear the extent to which this consistency is a reflection of basic psychological similarities in human beings. [26]

[18] As long as the world exists, the possibility for evil remains. This is because in important respects good things are the cause of evil; there is nothing else to be the cause except for existing things, and all existing things have some measure of goodness somewhere. Utilizing Aristotle’s theory of four dimensions of causality, Aquinas reasons that there must always be a material cause of evil, a medium of operation, inasmuch as something must exist with qualities and powers that can be lost. The efficient cause must likewise be good, as evil can be brought about only by a being with its own qualities and powers. Finally, for Aquinas God is responsible for an ordered and various universe, in which there is a *diversity* of beings with different powers and potentialities. If variety is better than sameness, then this dictates the creation of corruptible beings. Whether this theodicy is convincing is not a question I wish to answer; my claim is that assuming such a perspective helps to make sense of the show. In this light, Joyce’s claim that “evil is always here,” a part of things and “of us” is not so far off the Thomistic mark. Nor is the exchange between Caleb and the First/Buffy:

> CALEB: “But you . . . you’re everywhere. You’re in the hearts of little children, you’re in the souls of the rich, you’re the fire that makes people kill and hate. The fire that will cure the world of weakness. They’re just sinners. You are sin.
> THE FIRST/BUFFY: I do enjoy your sermons.

("Touched")

Additionally, it is significant that much of the moral growth various characters, including Andrew, Anya, Faith, and Spike, undergo involves their having to take account of, and be accountable for, their own capacities for evil.

[19] As noted above, James South argues that while the first part of Season Seven figures evil as parasitic upon good, the latter part repudiates this metaphysics. Only by seeing past this model of evil, and the whole teleological frame supporting it, can Buffy escape the Hellmouth and her destiny as "Sunnydale Girl." [27] I think this analysis works pretty well, especially in terms of the Platonic metaphor of the cave. Buffy must indeed think "outside the cave, not in the sense of getting outside and seeing the Good, but the outside of the whole inside-outside the cave dichotomy." [28] She must think beyond/outside a teleology in which nothing is fortuitous, especially not her status as the Chosen one on a Mission. She does, of course; after coming by the scythe, an artifact with no status in the original Slayer narrative, and seeing her fantasies reflected back to her by the First/Buffy, it "occurs" to her that there are other possibilities in the Slayer narrative. Only after this occurrence can she and the gang rethink the meaning of power and defeat the First. South argues, convincingly, that this turn of events takes us out of the Platonic narrative into some other conceptual space. But what if we weren't quite in it to begin with? At the risk of perpetuating a desire-induced fantasy, I suggest that insofar as Thomism rejects Platonism, and opts for a world in which time and contingency is real, it is not obvious that its teleology is so rigidly deterministic, or good and evil so univocal. In the cave, Buffy's "occurrence" is inexplicable. In a Thomistic frame, it is an instance of "insight," [29] the process of going beyond the data with which one is presented to grasp its unity in an unexpected way. Irreducible to inference or deduction, it is nonetheless a quite ordinary experience. Where it takes us, if we weren't in the cave to begin with, is not so clear. Perhaps to where we were before, to a world of real existents manifesting myriad possibilities for good and evil, and a community of sometimes "amazingly screwed up" people working to save the world, thinking for some reason it is "something that really matters" ("End of Days"). In this world, even Aquinas admits that the Godhead remain "in hiding." [30] *BtVS* invites us to ponder these issues in so many imaginative ways, with wit and compelling characters. Metaphysical riddles and Spike without his shirt . . . that's worth staying in for!

[*] Many thanks to my readers for their helpful suggestions and to Josef Velazquez for a crucial clarification.

[1] Written by Tracey Forbes, “Beer Bad” (4004) is often castigated as one of the worst in the series. Yet Whedon claims, “I think it has some lovely stuff in it.” http://www.buffy.nu/article.php3?id_article=941

[2] Anderson, p. 226.

[3] “Bronze VIP Archive for December 15, 1998,” “The fact it (sic), the Christian mythos has a powerful fascination to me, and it bleeds into my storytelling. Redemption, hope, purpose, santa, these all are important to me, whether I believe in an afterlife or some universal structure or not. I certainly don't mind a strictly Christian interpretation being placed on this ep by those who believe that--I just hope it's not limited to that.” http://www.cise.ufl.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/hsiao/buffy/get-archive?date=19981215. Accessed May 21, 2004. Also cited in Anderson 212.

[4] Joss Whedon, “Commentary” for “Objects in Space.”. Continuing later, he notes, “I don’t want to paint myself as an intellectual. I don’t really know anything about philosophy. I did know that this book spoke to what I believe more accurately and truly than anything I had ever read.”

[5] Interpreters as diverse as Fredrick Copelston (324-25), W. Norris Clarke, and Bernard Lonergan all stress the primacy of ordinary experience as the starting-point for metaphysics. Throughout the paper, my interpretation combines elements of two contemporary Thomist movements: Existential Thomism, exemplified historically by Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain; and Transcendental Thomism, sparked by Lonergan’s more explicit consideration of Kant. For a brief overview, see “John Knasas on Thomistic Metaphysics Past, Present and Future."

[6] “John Knasas on Thomistic Metaphysics Past, Present and Future.”

[7] I think the passage Whedon is referring to occurs early in the book. “I very much like to pick up chestnuts, old rags, and especially papers. It is pleasant to me to pick them up, to close my hand on them; with a little encouragement I would carry them to mouth the

way children do. . . . So today, I was watching the riding boots of a cavalry officer who was leaving his barracks. As I followed them with my eyes, I saw a piece of paper lying beside a puddle. I thought the officer was going to crush the paper into the mud with his heel, but no: he straddled paper and puddle in a single step. I went up to it: it was a lined page, undoubtedly torn from a school notebook. The rain had drenched and twisted it, it was covered with blisters and swellings like a burned hand. The red line of the margin was smeared into a pink splotch; ink had run in places. The bottom of the page disappeared beneath a crust of mud. I bent down, already rejoicing at the touch of this pulp, fresh and tender, which I should roll in my fingers into grayish balls.

I was unable.

I stayed bent down for a second. I read I read "Dictation: The White Owl," then I straightened up, empty handed. I am no longer free, I can no longer do what I will.

Objects should not *touch* because they are not alive. You use them, put them back in place, you live among them: they are useful, nothing more. But they touch me, it is unbearable" (Sartre, *Nausea* 10).

[8] In a famous passage the protagonist encounters a chestnut tree: "So I was in the park just now. The roots of the chestnut tree were sunk in the ground just under my bench. I couldn't remember it was a root any more. The words had vanished and with them the significance of things, their methods of use, and the feeble points of reference which men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, stooping forward, head bowed, alone in front of this black, knotty mass, entirely beastly, which frightened me. Then I had this vision.

"It left me breathless. Never, until these last few days, had I understood the meaning of 'existence.' I was like the others, like the ones walking along the seashore, all dressed in their spring finery. I said, like them, 'The ocean *is* green; that white speck up there *is* a seagull,' but I didn't feel that it existed or that the seagull was an 'existing seagull'; usually existence hides itself. It is there, around us, in us, it is *us*, you can't say two words without mentioning it, but you can never touch it. . . . If anyone had asked me what existence was, I would have answered, in good faith, that it was nothing, simply an empty form which was added to external things without changing things in their nature. And then all of a sudden, there it was, clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It has lost the harmless look of an abstract category: it was the very paste of things, this root

was kneaded into existence. Or rather the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass, all that had vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder--naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness" (Sartre, *Nausea* 125-27).

[9] "A Taste of Existence." In the *Summa Theologica* Aquinas writes, "Existence is the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual' for nothing has actuality except so far as it exists. Hence existence is that which actuates all things, even their forms." Cited as ST, followed by Question, Article, and part number, then by volume number and page number. Thus ST 1.4.1: 1.21 designates Question 1, Article 4, Part 1, found in Volume 1 on page 21. Subsequent citations will be included in the text following the same convention.

[10] "A Taste of Existence."

[11] This final, grammatically obscure sentence is presented verbatim.

[12] This is the direction Bernard Lonergan takes. See "Knasas" for an overview of different strands of contemporary Thomism.

[13] Like Whedon, Merleau-Ponty finds meanings as a dialectical interplay of projection and disclosure. Like Whedon, Merleau-Ponty is a non-tragic atheist who continues to use Christian imagery in his descriptions.

[14] Seritella.

[15] As the First, in the form of Warren tells Andrew: "You know the rules. I can't take corporeal form. . . . Believe me, I would do this stuff if I could. I can't" ("Never Leave Me," 7009)

[16] Nussbaum. I am not suggesting that Nussbaum's Aristotelean particularism is ultimately compatible with Aquinas' affirmation of moral law.

[17] Lisa (no last name supplied) raises interesting points about some glaring inconsistencies in the Buffyverse, "Code of the Whedonverse - Elect and the Damned?" http://www.bloodyawfulpoet.com/essays/whedonverse.html.

[18] See Hibbs and Rambo. On Aquinas' notion of evil as privation, see ST 1.48.1: 1.248-9, "Whether Evil Is a Nature?": "One opposite is known through the other, as darkness is known through light. Hence also what evil is must be known from the nature of good. Now, we have said above that good is everything appetible; and thus, since every nature desires its own being and its own perfection, it must be said also that the being and the perfection of any nature is good. Hence it cannot be that evil signifies being, or any form or nature. Therefore it must be that by the name of evil is signified the absence of good. And this is what is meant by saying that *evil is neither a being nor a good*. For since being, as such, is good, the absence of one implies the absence of the other."

[19] Forster 7.

[20] This notion is of course problematic on several grounds. What are we to make of seemingly idle and random actions? To maintain that frivolous activities are not really exercises of will implies that Aquinas's theory is not adequate to account for human freedom. Conversely, it seems plausible that people can renounce things they sincerely believe to be essential for their own happiness, as when estranged spouses stay together for the sake of their children. See Kenny 68-70. While the second problem can be reconciled on the theological plane, the first remains.

[21] http://www.buffy-vs-angel.com/guide.shtml

[22] http://www.buffy-vs-angel.com/buffy_tran_116.shtml

[23] South.

[24] http://www.buffy-vs-angel.com/buffy_tran_142.shtml

[25] http://www.buffy-vs-angel.com/buffy_tran_142.shtml

[26] In this discussion, I've specifically steered clear of interpreting the First as something like a fallen angelic being. But for Aquinas, an entity like Satan was entirely compatible with a notion of evil as privation, and would likewise result in some consistency of qualities.

[27] South, paragraph 19.

[28] South, paragraph 26.

[29] Here I'm thinking particularly of the work of Bernard Lonergan.

[30] See Aquinas's prayer, "Adoro to Devote," online at several sources, including http://www.nashvilledominican.org/Prayer/Prayers_and_Devotions/Eucharistic_Prayers.htm.

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4.4
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Gwyn Symonds

"A Little More Soul Than is Written": James Marsters' Performance of Spike and the Ambiguity of Evil in Sunnydale

"James is an amazing actor who loves, loves, loves the process. . . ." David Fury, speaking about directing James Marsters in “Lies My Parents told Me” (DiLullo)

[1] Anyone attentive to fan affective response towards Spike as a character in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is aware of how the fans’ view of the moral good within Spike went beyond the writers' and the actor's own expectations. Many fans came to empathise with Spike, well before the story said it was permissible to believe in the possibility of his redemption (Symonds). As one commentator has pointed out, by the time the story catches up with what the actor already performs, ongoing revelation of the soul of the character, we feel that it is an addendum to an organic growth: "Spike is dead, but he hasn’t disengaged from life. And in Marsters’ agile, richly textured performance, you sensed Spike’s soulfulness long before he had a soul" (Millman) In the story it is the demon in the cave who gives Spike his soul in the finale to Season Six. However, while fans of the character responded to what they perceived as “soul-having” behaviour in Spike’s storyline due to the power of the redemption story itself, such response was also a result of James Marsters’ mesmerising performance in the role. Annette Hill’s empirical research into the complexity of audience identification with characters who do evil, violence, or are transgressive has shown that audience "feelings fluctuate according to context, characterization and personal opinion" and that even terms like identification are inadequate to describe the variety of audience responses that included terms such as "sympathy,” "empathy,” "relate,” "feel for,” "understand" as qualifiers to identification (40-41). Hill explores the choices viewers make to engage with a transgressive character, but the point is that we are engaged,

sometimes because of the context and sometimes beyond it. While James Marsters views the acting process as one of allegiance to the meaning of the text, he has also stated that "I'm always trying to play a little more soul than is written" when discussing his performance of Spike (Bernstein 22). In this assertion of the "soul," the good, that exists within Spike prior to his ensouling at the end of Season Six, Marsters draws attention to a creative space where the actor can own his performance independent of the storyline. This is a performance space where the actor can extend text into a more morally complex vehicle for affective impact beyond the intentions of the text, even as it fulfills those intentions.

[2] Bruce Beresford, the Australian film director, has said that even while directing he can forget himself in the face of an actor's performance: "Sometimes I watch actors and it's so exciting I completely forget to call 'Cut!' . . . What they were doing was so good, *so* engaging that it just carried me away" (123). Any viewer attentive to the subtleties of James Marsters' performance as Spike in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is "under the spell of the actor" (Gibson 47). Ross Gibson, in his book *Falling For You,* uses that phrase to define what he calls a transformative state experienced by the audience in response to presence in a great actor, a state physically equivalent to holding your breath. The romantic élan of such a view of the "spell" of a performance approximates the more popular ideas of acting as having "charisma" or "chemistry," often attached to the actor's tour de force in the role: "James Marsters, the charismatic American actor who plays the British Spike. . . ." (Millman). However, what a term like "charisma" might mean in Marsters' performance needs further definition. Those of us in academia who write on the show have noted the power of the performance but have made little attempt to define or analyse its impact, despite that performance being one of the most crucial factors in audience reception of the show, and of the show's exploration of evil in Sunnydale.[1] With due humility, James Marsters himself is aware that more than his acting contributes to the impact of his performance: "The words aren't mine, the camera placement isn't mine. There are so many things that make me look cool and I'm not doing it" (Shadowkat). Yet the fact remains that the performance stands out from all other performances on the show and has a crucial impact on the exploration of violence as transgression in the story. In her book *The Actor Speaks,* Janet Sonenberg reminds us that "Great acting is not magic," that it is an interplay of "talent, technique and inspiration" and an acting process (1-2). It is the explicit nature of Marsters' acting process, as he has revealed it in statements on his role and in the performance of Spike's redemption from evil, that is a key to audience identification with the character.

[3] In answering questions about his acting over the years, James Marsters emerges as a practitioner who brings to his performance a personal candour and professional intensity. The use of the personal psychological platform and emotional vulnerability that forms the basis of Method acting accounts for some of the intensity of his performance of Spike:

> I think the Method is very conducive for film and television because the Method is suspending your disbelief like you're asking the audience to. So you build an imaginary world and then release yourself into it. Sean Penn calls it the Cage. Meryl Streep calls it the Box. I call it the Sandlot. But basically, once you know the parameters of the world, you can improvise and you cannot make a mistake, because you're in the world, basically. (Lameal2002 and Laurie)

As a method actor, using that form of concentrated immersion in a role, Marsters has often spoken of the personal effects finding character motivation has had on him emotionally and psychologically. He has been quoted as saying to the writer and Executive Producer Marti Noxon: "You just cannot hide around here. You guys just take your pens and pencils and you just come right into the soul . . ." (Lameal2002). For Marsters, the exploration of "personal demons" is still about being "true to the material":

> Acting gives me a chance to excise my demons, to explore my insecurities . . . especially on a show that writes so close to the bone as this one does. You can't get away with not being pretty honest about yourself and be true to the material. I kind of feel like I'm on this roller coaster that is twice as scary as the one I thought I was going to get on. (Lameal2002)

Giving an example of that sense of personal risk, Marsters has spoken extensively of the emotional cost of this acting process in relation to his performance in the attempted rape scene in the Season Six episode, “Seeing Red” (6019): "Yeah, the worst of it was the bathroom scene. I went home in tears. I was crying in the bathtub, ‘I'm not a rapist.’ Oh, that was horrible” (Lameal2002). That sense of personal risk the actor feels in his art is used in a portrayal that is raw with emotional depths. The personal cost of performance is associated for the actor with the way the performer makes the character believable, linking into personal experiences and then portraying authentic human emotions in character. Such emotions are the basis for creating a sense of the complexity of Spike as a character; what it feels like to yearn for requited love; what it feels like to be conflicted in the desire to do good; what it is for Spike to be a human in the skin of a vampire:

> That's what you discover . . . that human beings are really complicated, beautiful, horrifying, wonderful things. And if you get the courage just to say that I'm not going to hide behind a mask of a character but I'm going to use acting to reveal my real self. (Lameal2002)

Some level of personal revelation, for Marsters, fuels character

complexity.
[4] Apart from viewing his technique in revelatory Method terms, he has also talked of the ways the transfer from theatrical performance to television has impacted on his role in storytelling to use such character complexity to reach out to an audience's sense of the possibilities of plot development:

> I miss the stage. The stage is cool. On stage you're really in control in a way that you're not in control on TV at all. On stage you tell a story, in film you're just a building block for someone else to come tell the story later and that was kind of a hard adjustment for me. They wouldn't even tell me what I was doing next week. (Lameal2002)

Consideration of the actor's role in the light of such limitations has led to a strong sense of the impact he is trying to have as an actor on the viewer of Spike's story. When discussing the loss of control an actor has when doing television work, where he has little or no advance knowledge of his character's arc, he has noted the way his sense of being closer to his character is invigorated by plot uncertainty. What he has called being "in the same room as Spike": "I keep myself in the dark on purpose because it's kind of refreshing to just be like Spike and not know and to just fight for what you want week to week and hope you get it" (Lameal2002). The actor is using what is unknown in the story to explore character motivation in a space that is not determined by a pre-determined plot or arc or even by prior characterisation. Sonenberg talks of the possibilities of such an approach:

> Actors who leap to early classifications of characters or to immutable choices to mitigate their discomfort may produce indicated, one-dimensional performances. All good acting processes…allow for periods of not knowing. They supply structures the actor can imaginatively explore where the answers may be found. They give the actor the confidence to work toward the unknown result because they've proven, over time, that a moment inevitably arrives when the actor comes to know. (8-9).

This form of acting, in which Spike's potential for redemption is determined moment by moment, was combined by Marsters with an intent to strive for an empathic response from the audience, the "hook" that would lead to audience sympathy for, and understanding of, the character in all of his incarnations. The pre-vamped William, his character's identity before he is transformed into Spike, whom we meet in a flashback scene in the episode "Fool for Love" (5007), was one such challenge: "I wanted so much for the audience to hook into him because really, when Joss was writing stuff like, 'I know I'm a bad writer, but I'm a good man', that's Joss. So I wanted to be true to that . . ." (Lameal2002). In his acceptance speech for the 2004 Spacey

Awards, James Marsters talked of missing the "moment to moment" interaction and communication with the audience that occurs in theatre performance but noted that the awareness of that communication still influences his performance: "I feel like I've been reaching out over the years during all the takes and stuff, knowing that there were people watching and there were people who were interested and I feel like you guys are reaching back." He aimed for a particularity of impact, a relationship with the viewer, as he performed in the present story moment of Spike's character development. The hook for Marsters was to encourage the viewer to care about his character of William/Spike and, through the screen, to create a relationship with his unseen audience.

[5] Despite not knowing what was coming next for his character, Marsters wished to portray forward movement for Spike, particularly in the face of the solidification of Spike's image as defined by the emblematic aspects of his character— such as Spike's coolly evil, black leather coat:

> I guess, if it's not broke don't fix it, you know. And I guess having one look kind of helped solidify the character in the audience's mind, but then when I got on the show and was on the screen more, I was really arguing to change the look of the character. I kept saying if we keep him in the same costume, we're communicating to the audience that he's the same person. That there's nothing more to learn from him, about him. So, I was always trying to get something new going. (Lameal2002)

Crucially for what is seen on screen, Marsters' desire to portray character progression, complexity, and potential was independent of what was archetypal about the character. Given the character entered the Buffyverse as a disposable villain, graduated to a morally confused assistant to the heroine on her journey, finally finding his own redemption in death in a story arc that developed as the series progressed, Marsters used story uncertainty to telegraph the possibility of Spike's redemption even within the trappings of the comic villain and the comic anti-hero. The British actor Simon Callow has talked of "trying to find the archetypal in a character" as a means to preparing for a role and thus to "submit to his (the character's) ideas and impressions of the world" (10). There is no need to jettison the archetype while going deeper. For Marsters, Spike could wear the coat as archetype of evil while he took the performance to a more nuanced level.

[6] During his years on the show Marsters was aware of fan desire to see Spike redeemed:

> Striving for that emotional resonance is really what artists are about, and we shouldn't shy away from it. I think that redeeming

> Spike is something that people in their hearts have wanted for a long time. I've seen a lot of T-shirts around that say, "Love. Redemption. Spike." Spike's love of Buffy sent him on his journey to get his soul back. (Interview with James Marsters. *Dreamwatch*)

However, in other print interviews and Question and Answer appearances at fan conventions, partially in response to such fan hopes in Season Six, he commented in condemnatory terms on Spike as the heroine's boyfriend, and on that character's status as a "cool" representation of evil—an effort to counteract the fan "sympathy for the devil" that his own performance was partially responsible for:

> I became that unhealthy boyfriend that many girls have in their life, the bad boy who might be really sexy and dangerous and gets their sexual stuff firing, but the girls end up getting burned by it. That storyline played out so dramatically, I thought that the character probably should be killed off. I didn't know if he'd be redeemable after season six. (Interview with James Marsters. *Dreamwatch*)

The concern with impact on the audience of his sympathetic portrayal of a character that went on to attempt to rape the heroine, Buffy, led to Marsters' unease with the negative impact empathy for the character, or the character's allure, might have on the real life motivations of female viewers:

> When he thought the chip was out, he went straight for a victim and if it wouldn't have been for the chip, he would have killed that girl, right? [audience says no] Yeah . . . maybe, I know you want to believe but . . . girls, repeat after me: "If a man is mean, he'll be mean to me." (Lameal2002 and Laurie)

This expressed concern that young women not take the wrong message for their own life experience from his empathic portrayal of a "bad" boyfriend for the heroine is bound up with the explicit canon of the Buffyverse, dictating that without a soul Spike could not be redeemed.

[7] One of the writers and executive producers, David Fury, rather more vehemently, also voiced concern that fans who were "shippers" (supporters) of the Spike and Buffy relationship were missing the moral point:

> To those who feel my conviction that Spike can never be redeemed and cannot someday end up with our heroine, shows a lack of imagination of my part, I say you're right. It is beyond my limited imagination to see a strong, independent, female character end up

> falling for a murderer who would be killing innocent people were he not suffering from chip affliction…I regret I don't have the creative mind that, say, Thomas Harris has when he saw fit to sell out the character of Clarice Starling by having her become lovers with a cannibalistic psychopath, charming and brilliant as he may be…For those of you who fault my thinking, I can only say I'll try to be more open minded in the future. In the meanwhile, S/B shippers, you can go back to writing your penpals, Richard Ramirez and the Hillside Strangler, and I hope they finally accept your marriage proposals. (Allyson)

As Allyson, the web mistress of the Fury website and interviewer went on to say in her review of the controversy amongst Spike fans those remarks engendered: "Thus began a long battle with people who believe that Fury was being offensive to fans. His view was that a character that had spent two hundred years killing people and eating them, and then threatened to murder the woman who he professed to love if she didn't reciprocate, is not a good." It may be that Marsters and Fury underestimate the media literacy of viewers on this issue, and in general. It might be useful to view Mr Marsters' and Mr Fury's concerns about the portrayal of Spike's attempt to rape Buffy in the light of what Hill has called the "reactive mechanisms of thresholds and self-censorship" with which audiences view violence (51). In her empirical research into audience reception of violence, Hill has defined thresholds as the violence we personally find disturbing and self-censorship as the choices we make to view or not to view. Even James Marsters has said that he has often chosen or rejected roles as an actor on the basis of the context of the fictional violence he is asked to portray:

> It's very scary because sometimes on this show you're asked to do things that—there have been things on this show that I've been asked to do that if a movie came along that asked me to do those things, I might have passed…[Someone in the audience suggests like playing a rape scene.]…I don't like that. I can't even watch a movie where that's in there. I get up and want to kill the guy. It's my personal issue. So, that was one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life, not even as a job, because Sarah and I are friends. I told Joss, "Nobody's safe around here. You cut right to the bone, dude. This is not a safe show." (Topel)

The complexities of viewer response are no less emphatic when it comes to viewing or interpreting what they see on screen. Hill's results, in line with a wealth of audience reception research, shows us that viewers are aware of the complexity of their own responses to violence and violent characters and of the role personal tolerances and the choice to engage with such characters play in boundary testing and in the decision to identify with such characters.

[8] It may be necessary to dispense with the question of whether it is morally wrong to care about Spike, or any other transgressive character, in whole or in part. It is a question that assumes that most viewers who do sympathise are media illiterates who cannot tell fantasy from fiction, or who cannot respond with moral awareness to a nuanced performance that involves the delineation of moral complexity. Viewers come to a work of fiction with a media literate suspension of disbelief that allows them to care without losing the moral compass with which they live their daily lives. Audience reception studies such as Hill's have noted overwhelmingly how media literate and morally independent viewers are in their reception responses. They are aware, they reason, they ignore, they critique their responses, they choose and, above all, they identify emotionally in context, as they move from media event to event. In a section on "Aesthetics: the Beauty of Crime" in the book *The Sopranos and Philosophy,* Noel Carroll, James Harold, and Mike Lippman, in separate articles, engage in the debate over whether viewer sympathies with a reprehensible character like the successful sociopath and family man Tony Soprano are morally acceptable. All three offer insight but, typically, they are caught up, as Fury and Marsters are, with whether viewers *should* feel some form of viewer guilt or responsive discomfort for such sympathy. Since audiences do identify, the point may be moot to begin with. Identification, in all the range of responses that Hill defines it, is not just about cathartic viewer self-indulgence in bewitching and repressed forbidden desires. Carroll rightly describes the viewer as forming a moral alliance with Tony Soprano "within the relational structure of the fictional world" ("Sympathy" 129). In other words, who viewers identify or sympathise with depends on context. Quoting the Executive Producer of *The Sopranos*, David Chase, quoting Renoir's *Rules of the Game,* he notes that "the problem is that everyone has his reasons" ("Sympathy" 135). To flip that quote, the very "reason" we identify with characters like Tony Soprano or Spike is that "everyone has his problems." Viewers care because Tony Soprano and Spike have a hard time of it. If stories have a point beyond mere passing the time, it is that they explore the moral and emotional complexity of the human condition. The viewer caring for a character is a response to interpretative complexity provoked by the story and the acting performance.

[9] The "sympathy for the devil" response is built into the story about, as well as the performance of, Spike. It is notoriously easy for an audience to sympathise with the character who is the underdog, who is on the outside trying to get in, whatever the moral baseline he starts from. In response to a question I put to him at a fan convention in Australia, asking for his opinion on why so many female viewers identified with his character, even in a show that offered them a female heroine with which to identify,[2] James Marsters replied that he felt it

had to do with the fact that, on a show where the core characters were initially the outsiders, Spike was even further "outside" (Marsters, "Q & A"). It is hardly surprising that Spike's exclusion from an acceptance he so passionately desires from Buffy, the woman he loves, and the constant rebuffing of his attempts to reform by Buffy and the Scoobies, created empathy in the audience. Who among any viewing audience has not felt excluded at one time or another? While there are more morally acceptable characters, such as the Scoobies, with which viewers can ally in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, their own character failings, often morally compromising in their personal relationships, narrowed the moral gap between them and the all too human, aspirational, morally conflicted anti-hero that Spike became. In his discussion of audience identification with the morally corrupt Tony Soprano on *The Sopranos,* James Harold quotes Plato's view of the hero's journey as one where we "take his sufferings seriously" (143). Viewer empathy allows all suffering to be taken seriously, hero or not. Spike's status as outsider, rejected, unrequited lover and morally conflicted vampire, and intense human suffering, encouraged viewers to care.

[10] Alternatively, the written premise of the Buffyverse, that a demon/ vampire without a soul is evil and unredeemable, is well supported in the text and Marsters' performance is in a conflicting relationship with that canon. The audience knows Spike is evil because the "good guys" in the story, characters like Xander and the heroine Buffy, and the writers in off-screen interviews as well, tell them so. Spike's actions in the story also support the fact that he is evil. Spike does some pretty unpleasant things like killing people and attempting to rape the heroine. However, other actions by Spike in the story seem to raise the possibility that he can be better than his vampiric nature defines. In an article illustrating how screenwriters telegraph to the audience that a newly introduced character might have some good in him, Chris Hewitt talks of a characterisation technique called "petting the dog"—where a screenwriter will have an unlikable character do something sentimental we can admire, to counter a first impression we have that he is not someone we should admire. The quintessential scene he quotes to illustrate the techniques is Jack Nicholson's character in *As Good As It Gets*: "He's this miserable, racist, homophobic creep, but he likes that little puppy in the hallway, so you think, 'He's OK. Who cares if he hates people'." Similarly, in one of the very first scenes where the audience meets Spike, in "School Hard" (2003), he is shown as caring and concerned about his clearly insane, vampire lover Drusilla. Significantly, he immediately shifts from vamp face to his human one as his tone of voice softens as he speaks to her. A loving human trait is emphasised, even as he enters as the villain.

[11] The audience also knows Spike is evil, because he himself is at pains to assert it: "She thinks I'm confused because she's confused. I'm

not confused. I know what I am. I'm a killer. I'm evil" ("Smashed," 6009). However, ironically, Spike makes that assertion as he is trying to work himself up to killing a girl in an alley— under the illusion that the behaviour chip implanted in him to stop him hurting humans has ceased functioning— in the episode "Smashed." Playing against the words, Marsters' performance clearly feeds the audience perception that Spike has the potential for redemption and is suffering as he wrestles with the urge to kill again. Ironically, not wrestling against it, but to follow it through. "Look at all the goodies," Spike appreciatively drools as he surveys the populace in the alley. However, when the girl he is stalking screams in fright, his satisfaction at her fear, "That's right, you should scream," is more an attempt to assert the old order of his existence. The verb "should" is less confident than relieved that someone is screaming in fright at the sight of him. Hanging around with the heroes, he has not had that response in a while. This is the way his existence on the Hellmouth "should" play out: "Creature of the night here, yeah? Some people forget that."[3] Spike is right here; we have forgotten that.

"Smashed" is an episode well into Season Six. We have not seen him kill any human since Season Four's "Harsh Light of Day" (4003) when, in his pre-chip days, he kills the owner of the Magic Box.

> SPIKE: Just 'cause she's confused about where she fits in, I'm supposed to be too? 'Cause I'm not. I know what I am. I'm dangerous. I'm evil.
> WOMAN: I-I'm sure you're not evil.
> SPIKE: Yes, I am. I am a killer. That's what I do. I kill. And, yeah, maybe it's been a long time, but . . . it's not like you forget how. ("Smashed")

As he paces back and forth trying to work himself up to biting the girl it is increasingly obvious that he is not sure who he is, for all he is spouting the premise of the Buffyverse that he is a dangerous killer. He is more than out of practice, he seems less than enthusiastic about the act itself. James Marsters conveys this particularly in the way he pauses as he seems to be asking the girl, himself, and viewer in general for endorsement of the truth of what he is saying:

> Spike: You just (pause) do it. And now I can (pause) again, all right? So here goes. ("Smashed")

That redundant and questioning "all right," and the announcement of impending action, "so here goes" hang there, seeking reassurance. He is talking to himself, of course. It is he who has no answer, who cannot say for sure that all is right with his sense of his evil self. He does not know who he is. Spike then morphs into vamp face and tries to bite the girl. The viewer is not left in much doubt that, if the chip had stopped functioning, Spike would have bitten the girl. Drew Z. Greenberg, the

writer for this episode, in his commentary to “Smashed” on the Season Six DVD set, comments that Spike is a conflicted character in this scene. He voices his own uncertainty as to whether the point of the scene is just that it confirms Spike is evil:

> I’m not so sure that’s exactly what’s going on. I think it’s important to leave some of the subtlety to the viewer…to figure out what’s going on for yourself. And I’m not even sure that it’s particularly clear. I think that Spike is a conflicted character, just like all the characters on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. He’s got a lot of things going on and if you pay attention, you can see that he has to psyche himself up to the biting. So the question becomes does he want to bite the girl, or does he want to want to bite the girl. He has to do a lot of convincing himself, so what does that mean? I dunno, I’m just the writer.

With his somewhat flippant, "I dunno, I’m just the writer,” Greenberg is acknowledging the role of audience reception and the actor’s performance in interpretation. It is to the audience that Marsters, pursuant to his acting credo, reaches out in his performance here. What we are given by the words, and Masters performance, is the destruction of Spike’s desire to do evil from within.

[12] This dissolving immorality is strikingly present, in the performance alone, in the scene in “Crush” (5014), when a chipped Spike is offered a newly killed girl to drink by Drusilla, his vampire ex-girlfriend, in the Bronze on her brief return to Sunnydale. This acting of Spike’s indecision and hesitancy is quintessential Marsters. There is no dialogue. Attention is drawn away from the lifeless body in Spike’s arms as the camera focuses on Spike’s face and we are held in suspense, waiting for Spike’s decision to drink or not. There is no rush to drink as Marsters has Spike look back at Drusilla, trying to decide if he can trust her, trust himself, trust any decision at all? We do not know; it is all possible. Spike’s chest rises and falls as the actor breathes more rapidly, there is tremor in his face, his gaze intent. Then, as if mustering all his willpower, Spike decides as the actor pauses and then lunges, and Spike brutally drinks from the dead body. Bert States, commenting on the phenomenology of acting in theatrical production, points out the sense in which there is a "narrator hiding in the actor" in the way in which, as he performs, he can shift between self-expressive and representational modes, as well as take on a collaborative mode with the audience. The utility of looking at performance this way, as States says, is that it allows for audience selectivity:

> In other words, it is not a simple matter of following the "intention" of the speaker but of abandoning one’s senses to the shifting appeals of the speech (and the actor’s speech, of course, should be

understood to include gesture, presence, and all the aspects of his performance of the role). (24)

This view also allows us more awareness of the way an actor is both playing and representing the character. While on a television screen and cinema, unlike the theatre, the audience's sense of both the actor and the character are framed by editing, lighting, music etc, it is still true that the actor himself can draw audience attention to the illusive aspects of the art and create a space in which he himself can comment on the action independent of other aspects of his speech or the plot. In this dialogue free action in the Bronze, the subtlety of Marsters' portrayal makes us aware of the process of the acting itself and of the effect it has on representation, of the techniques that create the performance and extend what is written, of the elements in Marsters' performance that keep the viewer suspended, momentarily, between will he or won't he drink from the girl?

[13] In a discussion of the non-verbal physical actions in Samuel Becket's *Act Without Words I*, Zarilli discusses"acting specifically without reaching conclusions" as a moment of theatrical action that does not prefigure the outcome (197). It is in such a way that the door to the character's redemption is kept open in the above scene, and later in "Smashed" when Spike tries to bite the girl in the alley. It is the tantalizing nature of that ever present redemptive potential in the performance of the character that makes for a powerful affective audience impact when Spike does fail to do the right thing. Spike loves Buffy and, because of her, he spends most of his time from Season Five on doing good and fighting on her side. Friedrich Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* has said that those who fight monsters should take care that they do not become monstrous. With Spike the opposite is true. In conflict with his monstrous self, Spike reveals that he is very much in danger of becoming the good man he was before he was vamped: "I know I'm a bad poet but I'm a good man and all I ask is that . . . that you try to see me" ("Fool for Love"). William/Spike's pre-vamped plea to Cecily, a rejecting and haughty Victorian lady of his poetic dreams, could be the mantra of his journey through the Buffyverse. As he struggles to do good, he wants Buffy, in particular, to see him, to see that he is capable of redemption. Buffy says to Ford, a human who wants to be a vampire that he will not be himself after being vamped: "Well, I've got a newsflash for you, braintrust: that's not how it works. You die, and a demon sets up shop in your old house, and it walks, and it talks, and it remembers your life, but it's not you" ("Lie to Me," 2007). Except with Spike, something of the good man has survived and that layer to the character is suggestively telegraphed in the actors performance.

[14] In discussing the director Cassavetes' use of improvisation, Kouvaros notes, "His technique is designed to open the moment of

filming to those gestures, actions and movements not determined in advance by the script," to aspects of an actors performance that tell us more than the script determines (55). The position of the spectator created by such a performance is one in which the viewer of Spike's journey finds himself emotionally ahead of the story and increasingly at odds with its moral premise. By the time Spike goes off to get a soul, many fans thought the possession of the soul as a indicator of redemption was overrated, that Spike did not need one to be redeemed, and that he was morally superior to many of the human characters who possessed one. That fan sympathy impacted the storyline. The Executive Producer, Marti Noxon, has acknowledged that there was a need to counter audience sympathy for Spike by having him attempt to rape Buffy in order to give the character a moral imperative to seek a soul (Symonds). It is less well documented that the redemption storyline itself was a result of that same empathic audience response to Marsters' performance. James Marsters noted on receiving honorary membership to a fan group: "I thank you for being on line calling for that [Redemption], by the way. Joss *does* go on line and he *did* hear you. And there is *no* way you're going to give Joss Whedon an idea for his show, but if you plant seeds, *maybe* he'll get his own. And something tells me you guys had a hand in that. In the soul" (Marsters, Honorary Proclamation). Joss Whedon has voiced that there was story uncertainty about where Spike was heading that mirrors the character's uncertainty about himself, and the conflict the potential the actor was intent upon portraying. In answer to a fan question at the *Nocturne* convention asking how far was it possible for the character to go in being "a real hero figure," he said:

> That's one of the questions we're asking ourselves now as we break. Next season, is like, y'know, 'cause Spike has done very selfless things, he's shown real caring, and at the same time he can be a complete pain in the butt. We don't know the answer to that, and we're sort of gonna feel our way around and find out. And different writers have different opinions about how heroic he's been and his motivations and what's gone on, and we debate about it a lot. The only thing I can tell you is it's a real issue for us: where he is he heading and how far can we take him in that direction and still feel that we're being true to the character? (Valente)

Joss Whedon is talking about Season Five Spike and uses the term "debate" to describe how there were differing opinions amongst the writers about Spike's final moral and heroic fate. The capacity for heroism and redemption hanging in the balance continued to develop in the storyline and in the performance. The unpredictability of that fate even for those plotting the storyline and the humanity and fallibility of the character's capacity for evil as well as good, created the performance

space for the actor to reach out to the audience to convince it that redemption was possible.

[15] As a part of his answer to my question to him at the Australian fan convention mentioned above, Marsters added that the more the scripts required he portray evil, the more he was doing everything he could in his performance to show potential for the opposite (Marsters, “Q & A”). At a *Shore Leave* convention, the actor was asked why a redeemable Spike appealed to many fans over an evil Spike?

> Because I was doing everything I humanly could . . . with my eyes . . . and with my acting. . . . Yeah, it was my feeling that it was my job to keep the character something that.… I didn't want anyone . . . oh man . . . see, the more evil they put him in the writing, the more I thought it was my responsibility to keep something that you could latch into . . . and I guess they went for the acting not the writing [laughing] no . . . they're having their cake and eating it too. Basically, [sigh as he gathers his thoughts] the way the drama functions is that you go through the story behind the eyes of the lead character. So everybody here, when you guys are watching *Buffy*, male or female, you guys are Buffy right? And so effectively, you guys have to want Spike to be better just as Buffy's hoping that she can find something in Spike that's better and that she's not as big of a fool as she thinks she's being . . . so it was really important for me to keep tempting you guys to think there could be a good resolution to this. . . . (Lameal2002 and Laurie)

Trying to define the power of a performance in the creation of a moment in a performance and discussing breathing and eye movements, Gibson denotes breathing and looking as the basic skills of the actor: "by concentrating on the eyes and aspirations of the actors, the audience feels a direct relationship with the performer." Thus "through the proxy of the actor, you can feel how the dramatic world exerts itself on the flesh and blood of your representative, this fallible human quester," so that "spoken performances can be inspiring. Literally so. Thrillingly so. And distressingly so” (40-42). If there is some kind of viewer seduction involved in the way an audience responds to acting, then how that seduction is working, the much quoted “charisma,” is about the technique invested in the performance. Murray Smith, citing Wolfenstien and Leites, aptly describes the "imaginative slumming" the spectator indulges in with the “good-bad” character who has redeeming aspects that mitigate wrongdoing (224). In our enjoyment of Spike’s glee in his villainy, viewers are certainly engaging in that form of viewing self-indulgence. However, if that were all that was happening then David Fury’s view of the perversity of audience attraction to an immoral Spike would be the end of the matter. Joss Whedon in his commentary to the

series' finale "Chosen" (7022), on the Season Seven DVDs, speaks of Marsters' "ability to turn on a dime," referring to his ability to create pathos and comedy as he dies in that episode with his delivery of the line about his soul stinging as it burns him from the outside: "The idea of the soul as the thing that elevates and kills him felt like a good wrap up and again, going from the epic to the humorous in a heartbeat, that's our boy." The sardonically curious wonder and dryness with which Marsters delivers Spike's line that he can feel his soul and it "kinda stings," a fittingly comic acceptance of the consequences of having a soul, undercuts any sentimentality entering the complicated portrayal Marsters gives us of Spike's final moments. Audience response to the performance prior to that death was not simply about overlooking Spike's evil but of choosing to respond primarily to the character's heartfelt desire to change for the sake of love. Marsters' performance is not encouraging the audience to respond amorally, but to ally itself with profoundly positive human emotions, with Spike's yearning for love and the character's deep desire to be better than he is.

[16] Frustratingly, Spike fans were aware of the irony that this was not supposed to be Spike's journey and that, as the demon foil to Buffy's heroic journey, he was only supposed to be the sideshow. This journey threatened the show's black and white premise in a storyline that involved characters making complex moral choices in a fictional world that started out with the demons as the polar opposites of the heroes. The fictional complexity of Marsters' portrayal of Spike's choices, in the context of the character's aspirations to be a better man for the sake of love, invited an empathic response from the audience because the chance of the failure of those aspirations was always very real. The fact that, relative to the other Scoobies, Spike is the only character the audience sees struggling in quite this way, with no support and constant rejection of his aims, inevitably increased sympathy. Such sympathy is fully cognisant of the fact that what is evil about Spike is not an attractive or moral trait in the world outside the screen. However, such awareness is not incompatible with audience empathy for his struggle to be a better man. No Scooby character, including Buffy, is perfect or without internal conflict, including moral indecisiveness. Audience perceptiveness can take account of that moral relativity in judging the character of Spike. Nor is that empathy excessive if, at times, it leads the audience to feel he may be morally superior to the heroes—such as in his refusal to fight back when Buffy beats him in the alley in "Dead Things" (6013). As one critic, commenting on Spike's revelation to Buffy that he has regained his soul, has noted, Marsters' portrayal of Spike's struggle was emotionally wrenching and, ultimately, "haunting":

> Viewers saw proof of that in the haunting final scene of this season's best episode to date, "Beneath You" [7002], in which Spike revealed his soul to Buffy in an empty, moonlit church.

> Marsters gave Spike's madness and despair a moving, shattered dignity. There was something Shakespearean in his readings of lines like "Why does a man do what he mustn't but for her; to be hers," delivered in half-darkness, and in the devastating last shot: Spike striking a martyr's pose—draped around a large cross, bare back to the camera, flesh smoldering—for a love that Marsters calls "unquenchable." (Millman)

Emotional engagement with a story, and the moral evaluation that accompanies it, is the launching pad for imaginative contemplation of what it means to be human that fiction allows the audience to explore. Viewers do not morally debase themselves when they use stories to consider the deeply profound questions that Spike's fate dramatises:

> "You really can't change yourself for someone else," concludes Marsters. . . . "You really have to do it for yourself in the end. I think I would've said that he would've done it for Buffy at the end of last season, but after going through this season, I think he wanted to become a better person for himself. And he did." (Interview with James Marsters. *Dreamwatch*)

Consumed by fire as the Hellmouth crumbles around him, Spike does die to save the world. Believing that Buffy does not love him, sardonic even at the last about his souled status, he chooses to do good for its own sake. Even David Fury, in his commentary on the Season Seven episode "Lies My Parents Told Me" (7017), came around in the end:

> There's been a lot of controversy with my opinions about Spike and about his, the nature of Spike and a lot of people are concerned why is Spike, why is Spike letting her talk to him in that way? Why is he so hurt? He's a vampire. Why would he? And I think that was the point of this episode. It was to say Spike is an anomaly in the vampire world. He has some facet of his soul even if it was removed when he became a vampire. He has more humanity as a vampire than most vampires do. We haven't explained why that is but perhaps something about the character of him as a man, and he's retained it as a vampire.

That "something about the character" that Fury cannot define can be found in James Marsters' performance.

[17] Frank Renzulli, a writer on *The Sopranos*, himself an actor, has described the way in which an actor sometimes has to bridge two opposing and unrelated realities when delivering dialogue:

> There's usually a logic, there's a logic to the thought process and then, sometimes as in life, there's a non-sequitur. You know,

> talking about something, "how're your kids doing?," "blue cheese, I love blue cheese." So if you wrote that, the actor's got to find that bridge. He sometimes has to find the bridge from "how're your children" to "blue cheese." When you're on the set, if he's not finding that bridge, you're going to have to build one or help him out somehow. (Chase)

Perhaps evil was the non-sequitur of good in Spike's case when he started his journey as the comic villain. It is a vast performance chasm to reach across to convincingly portray the moral leap from evil to good, from monster to hero that Spike made. In a subtle portrayal, holding in play two apparently unambiguous moral realities, James Marsters found that bridge in an acting space beyond the words. The audience came to believe in Spike's unambiguous and heroic redemption because of that performance and, undoubtedly, Joss Whedon and the writers did too. In her brilliant and exhaustive article on *The Pitfalls of the TV Medium*, Shadowkat cites James Marsters in her discussion of *The Importance of The Actors: Can They Really Break or Make the Show*:

> It is all writing, and a really good actor understands that. Good acting is Not Messing Up Good Words. If you can release the potential of the words . . . . The best thing is to recognize a good script and then serve it…There is a lot to be said for good acting, but most actors will mess up good words. I'm not saying that acting's not valuable, and good acting is not rare—it is. But good acting is serving good words. It's releasing their power.

There is no question that James Marsters was "serving the words" but, in "playing more soul than is written," he did much more, he enhanced them. He was "releasing their potential" as he spoke them, but he also marked out a performance space in which he extended the emotional range of that "power." Through his technically nuanced performance, Marsters won over the viewers, the story, the story's creators and, as a result, Spike earned Buffy's love. In "Lie To Me," Buffy complains to Giles: "Nothing's ever simple anymore. I'm constantly trying to work it out. Who to love or hate. Who to trust. It's just, like, the more I know, the more confused I get. Does it ever get easy?" It takes a long time for Buffy to figure out Spike enough to declare her love for him, but then she does not see as much of him as the audience does. The viewers are probably paying more attention to Marsters' performance of Spike's soul emerging from a monster who, in spite of where he started, and against all the odds, overcame a pre-determined demonic destiny and chose to redeem himself

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Notes

[1] One exception is an unpublished conference paper which uses Gibson's view in an analysis of 'charisma' as an element in Mr Marsters' performance by Sue Turnbull.

[2] I might add that this was a question suggested to me by female fans who had identified with Spike rather than Buffy, despite the storyline being, ostensibly, one of female empowerment.

[3] Spike is referring to Buffy but some fans took it as a comment from the writer on the positive views of the character held by the audience.